





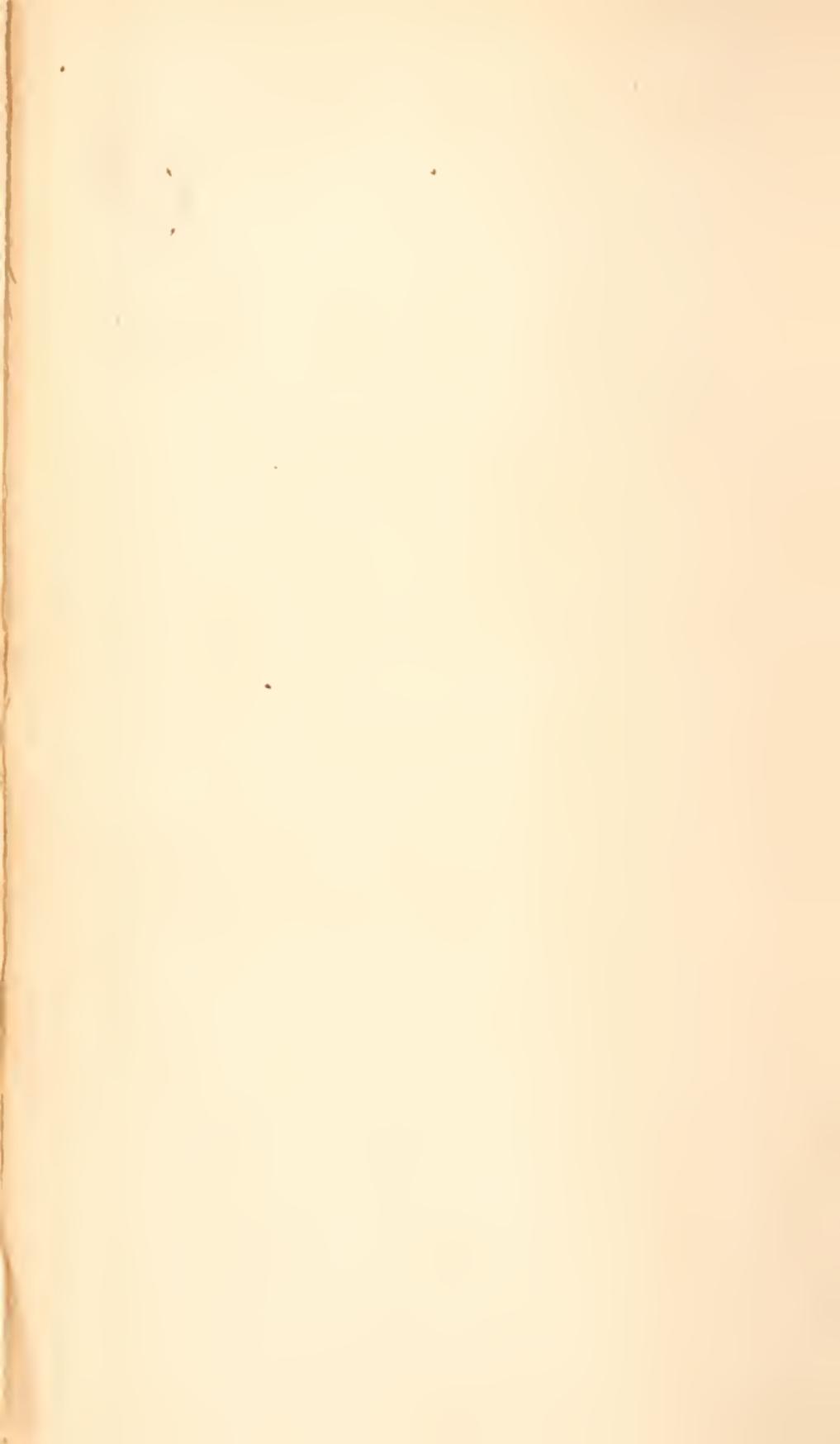
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# The St. Nicholas Series

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## DAMIEN OF MOLOKAI



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Father Damien.



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# DAMIEN OF MOLOKAI

BY

MAY QUINLAN

AUTHOR OF

"IN THE DEVIL'S ALLEY," ETC.

TOGETHER WITH

## FATHER DAMIEN

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE  
REV. DR. HYDE OF  
HONOLULU

BY

R. L. STEVENSON

(REPRINTED BY PERMISSION)

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TO  
MY FRIEND  
MRS. CHARLES BROOKFIELD

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## CHAPTER I

### THE SCOURGE OF LEPROSY

**I**N the days of old, when the Jewish priests were also the medical men of Israel, leprosy was regarded not only as a terrible disease, but as a signal punishment for sin. Loathsome to the senses and repulsive to the sight, it inspired in the multitude a feeling of horror as being a direct manifestation of the wrath of God. It was a tangible sign, like the fire that descended on the Cities of the Plain.

To us who review the past in the light of the present it seems more than probable that a considerable number of cases which were then considered leprous belonged in reality to those various skin diseases which are so closely allied with it. And while there appears to be no doubt that the true leprosy has existed from time immemorial, it is none the less a fact that a certain percentage of

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the lepers mentioned in the Old Testament were afflicted with a lesser kind of evil, which yielded to treatment. Real leprosy, on the other hand, was and is practically incurable.

And as the Greeks in later times were wont to consider all skin diseases as "the proper scourge of an offended Deity," so the Israelites clung to the belief that *zara'at* was a judgment of God—a Divine visitation for past evil. In other words, leprosy represented the dead fruit of iniquity.

Therefore in the judgment of the tribes every leper was accursed. He was a creature with whom no man might hold converse: he lay under the hand of the Avenger. No longer might he lift his voice in the councils of the living; from henceforth his fellowship was with the dead. As an outcast and a pariah he now must dwell, herded with the beasts of the field, allowed only to roam in the waste places which lay beyond the city gates. He was without a home. Rags and tears were his portion. Death was his only friend.

Unlike the gentler rulings of the New

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Testament, the iron law of Israel set hard and fast limits round the person of the leper, who, in testimony of his sin, was required to rend his garments, and—what was a still greater indignity among the Chosen People —was compelled to bare his head. Thus it is written in the Book of Leviticus : “ Now whosoever shall be defiled with leprosy, and is separated by the judgment of the priest, shall have his clothes hanging loose, his head bare, his mouth covered with a cloth, and he shall cry out that he is defiled and unclean. All the time that he is a leper and unclean, he shall dwell alone without the camp ” (Lev. xiii. 44-46).

That the life of the leper was wrapped round with sorrow is evident from those endless petty enactments which, by curtailing his liberty, must have rendered his days well-nigh unbearable. To quote but one example: Should the stricken man catch sight of a fellow being along the highway, he must straightway efface himself, and while he was yet afar off must awaken the echoes with his cry of self-condemnation. In some instances, as we read, this was

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done by a herald who preceded the leper—hence the rendering of the ancient Chaldee paraphrase of Jonathan by “A herald shall proclaim and say, ‘Depart ; depart from the unclean.’”

Curiously enough, the defilement of leprosy was judged to be a very subtle thing ; it was more moral than physical, the segregation of the leper being a purely ceremonial restriction, having its root in those elaborate and stringent laws which had been set down by Moses for the spiritual preservation of the people of Israel. For it is worthy of note that the Jew who was sound was in no sense defiled by contact with a leprous Gentile, but only with a leprous Jew. And the fact that the Jewish priests were, by virtue of their office, brought into the closest touch with numberless lepers, upon whose condition they had to give judgment, seems to prove conclusively that the regulations concerning the isolation of lepers were prompted by moral reasons alone.

To the clean of Israel every leper was regarded as a dead man. He had neither rights nor privileges. He existed more or

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less on sufferance, his attendance at public worship being subject to the goodwill of the people. Even then the leper might not offer praise in the synagogue. He must pray in a space set apart, whose length and breadth were not to exceed four cubits, and here within these narrow limits he had perforce to offer his petitions. Furthermore, it was decreed that he was to be the first to enter and the last to leave the synagogue.

No doubt it was by reason of the sorrowful fate reserved for the lepers that the Jewish priests were so solemnly charged to weigh well the symptoms of each case before uttering judgment. For in the Book of the Laws Moses writes with special care and minuteness when delivering such injunctions for the guidance of the priests. Every suspicious case was to be shut up for seven days. At the end of that time a second examination was to be made, and should the disease not have fully declared itself the patient was to be subjected to a further period of quarantine.

According to the author of Leviticus, leprosy was to be known by four distinct

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symptoms : (1) bright white spots or patches on the skin, the hair on which must also be white ; (2) the depression of the patches below the level of the surrounding skin ; (3) the existence of "quick raw flesh" in the centre of the patch ; (4) the spreading of the ulcer or scall.

Such were the signs of the plague of leprosy as known to the tribes before medical science came into its own. And according to these signs the sick man was judged ; and from the priests' verdict there was no appeal. Every sick man was bound to give himself up for inspection. "Go, show thyself to the priests!" was a command that kept pace with the ages. Thus, when any one among the Jews discovered upon himself any suspicious symptoms he was morally compelled to report himself for judgment. No matter what his position or degree might be, the regulation was binding on each one alike. The only exception to the rule was that if the disease showed itself only on the wedding day, then for the seven days of his nuptials the man was to go free. But on the seventh day he must render him-

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self up for judgment, after which, if the verdict went against him, he would be driven out for ever from the haunts of the living, to find a shelter among the gaping tombs. From that day marriage was banned to the leper. From that day he lived apart from humankind, drifting hither and thither in the grey solitude like a soul seeking for rest. When a certain time had elapsed the symptoms might diminish, and the stricken man was permitted to offer himself for examination a second time; after which, if the disease still clung to him, he must return whence he came. But if, in the opinion of the priests, the man was now clean, he was required to make sin offerings as prescribed in The Book. Should he be a poor man the holocaust might take the form of two pigeons, one of which was to be killed over running water. According to the Law, the sick man was then to be sprinkled with the blood of the victim before he could be admitted once more into communion with the Children of the Promise.

Thus, as we read, the Hebrew was

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reminded on every side that "he was of God's peculiar people. His time, his food, his raiment, his hair and beard, his field and fruit-tree, all were touched by the finger of ceremonial."

As regards the origin of leprosy—when it arose, and where it first appeared—nothing definite is known. All that can be gleaned is the fact that leprosy prevailed in Egypt as far back as three, or even four thousand years before the Christian era. Later on, in the reign of Amen-Hotep I., we find a score of prescriptions inscribed on the old papyri for the treatment of an apparently incurable disease called *ukhedu*, which is thought to be synonymous with the plague of leprosy.

Elsewhere we learn that many Jews were smitten with the disease during the days of the Captivity. Indeed, some modern authorities advance the theory that "the Egyptian bondage, with its studied degradation and privations, and especially the work of the kiln under the Egyptian sun, must have had a frightful tendency to generate this class of disorder."

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Manetho even goes so far as to assert that the Egyptians finally drove out the Israelites because of their leprosy ! \* But though this rendering of the Exodus does not accord with the Mosaic narration, it throws an interesting light on contributory causes—the overcrowding and the general want of sanitation in the Egyptian ghetto being largely responsible for the prevalence of the disease.

It must not be thought, however, that leprosy was confined to any one people or country ; for throughout the years we find frequent references to it in India so long ago as when Atreya reigned (*circa* 1400 B.C.) ; also in the Japanese records of five hundred years later.

Foremost among the individual lepers whose names occur in ancient history stands the patriarch Job. The exact nature of his disease has remained unknown ; but the Talmudists declare that Job's affliction was that which is known to-day as "scratching leprosy."

\* According to Manetho, 90,000 of the Jewish captives were lepers.

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Thus the scourge, when it befell, was justly regarded as worse than death itself. This, indeed, being considered the most awful of all human tribulations, was the curse which the old-time Israelite used to invoke, as the cheerful custom was in those days, upon the heads of his enemies. Thus we find David calling down the curse of leprosy on Joab for having so treacherously slain a noble foe. So, also, did Eliseus utter a malediction on Giezi for his mean covetousness, "which was calculated to bring the name of Israel into disrepute among the heathens." Ozias, too, was stricken with the plague for taking to himself the priestly office when he burned incense on the golden altar of the Temple. This reference to Ozias recalls the notable fact that he lived thereafter in a lazarus-house —this being the first authentic reference in ancient times to the existence of such an institution.

Among the profane records of a later period much information lies scattered through the old parchments. That the Greek and Roman physicians knew of the

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disease is evident from writings which are still extant. Pliny states that leprosy was unknown in Italy until the time of Pompey the Great, when it was supposed to have been imported from Egypt.

Herodotus writes that according to a popular belief then current in Persia no man was struck with leprosy except he who had committed a sin against the Sun ; that the leprous stranger was driven from out the country ; and, furthermore, such being the horror in which the Persians held the plague, that they even destroyed white pigeons, thinking them to be tainted with the dire disease.\*

\* In view of the important laws and regulations laid down by Zoroaster (660-583 B.C.) for the moral and social betterment of the Persian people, the question arises whether the segregation of lepers was enforced under his rule. To this Bishop Casartelli gives answer that: "though there is no direct legislation about lepers [in the Avesta], the very name of the disease therein employed, *paesō vitaretōtanus*=‘leprosy (causing) the body (to be) avoided’ [cf. Germ. Aussatz. from Aus-setzen] indicates the segregation of lepers [*tanus*=body, *vitaretō*=avoided, set apart, segregated]. The modern Persian name of leprosy is *pēs* (derived from *paesō*).

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During the early ages of the Church we find special rules laid down for the lepers of the community. According to the decrees of the Council of Ancyra, they were to be excluded from the churches. The Third Council of Orleans ordains that every leper must keep to his own diocese and refrain from wandering further afield. But apart from this restriction, the Council of Orleans marks the inception of a more humane treatment, for among the rules then set down, it is expressly ordained that the lepers were to be fed and clothed out of the Church funds. In the days of St. John Chrysostom, they were even permitted to live within the cities. But that they were obliged to keep more or less within certain limits is suggested by the instructions issued to the clergy that the lepers were to be communicated apart.

Sometimes the sinister figure of the leper reveals itself in one country, sometimes in another. Now it is the Lombard King Rothar who is making laws and regulations anent the marriage of lepers. Now it is Pippin; and again it is Charlemagne. In later

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years Robert the Bruce is quoted as a leper, and according to one authority was suffering from the affliction when he held the Parliament of Cambuskenneth. Henry III., of Winchester, is supposed to have died of the disease, as also Henry IV., head of the house of Lancaster.

Nor were more distant peoples immune, for according to a well-known authority it seems evident that leprosy was not unknown in America prior to the landing of Columbus, the existence of a pre-Columbian form of the scourge being proved by pieces of ancient pottery, representing deformities suggestive of this disease.

But omitting the records of other lands, and confining our attention to those of Western Europe, it is significant that the total number of leper hospitals at this time stood at 19,000, of which 2000 belonged to France alone. Indeed, to judge by the official records of the twelfth century, the kingdom of France would seem to have lain prone beneath the scourge.

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Nor was England in much better case. Here the disease had got a firm hold.\*

In the eleventh century the first leper hospital or lazarus-house was built in Canterbury, the last being erected in Highgate some time in the fifteenth century.† How many thousands suffered and died during those four centuries we have no means of knowing. But certain it is that the passing

\* According to one theory leprosy was brought into England by the Crusaders, who had contracted it while in the East, but this is disproved by the fact that the great leper house in Canterbury was built in 1096, *i.e.*, immediately before the first Crusade. From 1096 to 1472 there were in all one hundred and twelve leper hospitals in England, not to speak of those other lazarus-houses which existed in Ireland and Scotland (see Hastings' "Dictionary of the Bible"). Even as late as 1591, a leper hospital was built at Greenside, near Edinburgh; while the name of another and more famous leper settlement north of the Tweed has since been corrupted into the present Liberton [*i.e.*, Leper Town].

† The name Lazar was given to these hospitals in remembrance of Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary, to whom, conjointly, the leper hospital of Sherburn (Durham) was dedicated. In the same way the other term, *pauperes Christi*, by which the mediæval English lepers were known, owes its origin to him whom the Saviour loved.

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bell was never long silent, and at each tolling it sounded a leper's release. Leprosy was found to be here, there, and everywhere. It crouched beside the fields ; it hid behind the hedges ; it crept inside the hovel ; it defied the rich and mighty. Before its foetid breath men and women went down as ripe corn before the sickle. In its awful wake lay the creatures upon whom it had wreaked its vengeance, the extent of its ravages being faintly outlined by the long list of lazare-houses which are set down in the old parish records. In Norwich alone there were seven of these charnel-houses ; in King's Lynn five ; and so on, throughout the length and breadth of the land.

Happily the scourge of leprosy is no longer rife among us, and these things are now a memory. But although the plague has practically been stamped out in Europe, it still exists in lands more distant. Nor is this all, for, by a curious process of evolution, the modern form of the disease is of a more virulent type and character than the old, and among the worst forms of this latter-day leprosy, is that found to-day in certain islands of the far

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Pacific. There the scourge of leprosy assumed such proportions in the last century as to necessitate unusually drastic measures. Accordingly the Hawaiian Government in the year 1850 decreed that every leprous subject was to be seized as a malefactor and transported to a lonely island set apart as a State lazaretto. Here the victims of the fell complaint were doomed to live and die, without comfort and without succour. For, as in the olden days, they were cut off from the living and deprived of all hope. Set down on a barren headland from which there was no escape ; hemmed in by the frowning cliffs and the sullen sea, the lepers of Molokai felt themselves forsaken by God and man.

But as in Gospel times, so now in our own day, the heart of the Divine Healer was moved with pity for the stricken among His people. And lo ! He caused His voice to be heard afar off, even in a tiny Flemish hamlet that lay among the cornfields ; and at the sound, a soul awoke that was destined to bring good tidings to those that sat in darkness and in the shadow of death.

Thus once more, did the Mighty One

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choose as His ambassador one of the little ones of the earth—an obscure peasant, without position, without power—to whom He gave the command which in days of old He put into the mouth of the prophet Isaiah: "Strengthen ye the feeble hands. Say to the faint-hearted, take courage. . . . God Himself will come and save you."

## CHAPTER II

### EARLY LIFE OF JOSEPH DAMIEN DE VEUSTER

UNDER an arching sky of blue, a wide stretch of lowland lies out in the sunlight. It is a rich flat plain, without break or undulation. Sometimes a red-tiled farmhouse nestles down beside the cornfields, or the eye is attracted by a wayside shrine where the peasant children linger as they pass along the straight road that is guarded by poplars.

Further along, there stands a small hamlet with a Church in its midst, the cottage roofs just peering over a line of green.

Here and there across the country a giant windmill raises its arm as if in silent benediction ; while six miles off, on the northern horizon, lies the university town of Louvain, whose streets re-echo to the sound of passing feet.

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At Tremeloo, on the contrary, all is still. No sound disturbs the quietude of the listening fields. The hush of dawn is accentuated rather than broken by the distant bells. "Laborare est orare," say the bells; and not a man in the fields but bares his head and makes an offering of the new-born day.

How well has the poet set down the principle of national greatness in those few lines wherein he writes :

What is it makes a nation truly great ?  
" Her sons, her sons alone ; not theirs, but they ;  
Glory and gold are vile as wind and clay  
Unless the hands that grasp them consecrate.  
And what is that in man by which a state  
Is clad in splendour like a noontide day ?  
Virtue : Dominion ebbs and arts betray :  
Virtue alone endures."

Surely then, these sturdy sons of the soil, these silent, slow moving folk whose days are passed among her quiet furrows, close up to the heart of the great Earth-Mother, are the best material of a nation's wealth. Verily, in their souls are planted the seeds of the Greater Knowledge.

Humanly speaking, it is a dull uneventful

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life, this life of daily toil : a hard life too, and bare of reward. For the field labourer must work from sunrise till sunset, and in return receive but a pittance. With the exception of the Day of Rest, he has no leisure and but few pleasures. His life is one long monotonous round.

Yet, as Newman reminds us, "Man is born for labour, not for self ; what right has any man to retire from the world and profit no one ? He who takes his ease in this world, will have none in the world to come."

But however true this is from the moral point of view, it is none the less a fact that it is only the few to-day who do not raise their voices to demand a re-adjustment of social conditions and a fairer division of the good things of the earth. For truly does Maurice de Guérin speak, when he says, "What a mystery is that of all these rude and lowly lives ! The day will surely come when all these drudges of the world will stretch out towards it, their black and callous hands cracked by the handles of their tools, and will say : 'Lord, you who have said,

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“Blessed are the poor and lowly,” behold us !”

Such are the men of Tremeloo, and from this particular stock was born the simple peasant priest, Joseph Damien De Veuster, whose heroism was destined to be lauded among the nations, and whose name is now inscribed among the great men of all time.

Every age, happily, has its heroes. Some die for country ; others for a cause ; some have sacrificed themselves for the many, others for an individual friend or stranger ; but the sacrifice of Joseph Damien De Veuster was not as these. For though he died that others might live, his object was not so much to preserve the life of the body as to ensure the salvation of the soul. For that alone did he, in the flower of his manhood and the glory of his days, go down to a living death in the lazaretto, pouring out the riches of his health and strength in the service of the stricken, and wrestling single-handed with the spirits of darkness for the souls made reckless by despair. And this superhuman labour of love was to continue

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in health and sickness for sixteen years, even until he, too, fell a victim to the disease, and experienced in his own person the dissolution of the grave.

Before a sacrifice so awful, so complete, so absolute, the world held its breath. It was greater than heroism, better than bravery. It was the defying of death and the challenging of hell. And for what?—that he might save the souls of sinners.

The village of Tremeloo has changed but little, if at all, since the year of grace 1840 when Damien De Veuster was born. He was the sixth child of his parents, who, good simple folk, earned their bread by their labour in the fields. And no better setting could well be found for the future missionary and apostle, than the humble home which seemed to radiate an atmosphere of quiet peace. For it was here, in the white-washed cottage with its russet roof and wooden shutters, that he first drew in the strength and beauty of truth from the lips of those he loved. From his mother in particular, who possessed to the full that strong abiding faith which characterises

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every true daughter of Flanders, he learnt those early lessons, which in after years were to bear such wonderful fruit.

Indeed, the domestic setting of his home life might almost be a picture from the hand of some old Flemish master: the roomy kitchen with its tall chimney-piece flanked by the old brass candlesticks; the red flags strewn with yellow sand; the sacred prints on the walls, and, in a far corner, a holy water stoup beside a crucifix. And while the firelight played hide and seek with the shadows, a sudden gleam of red touched up the burnished copper utensils, the pride and joy of every Flemish housewife. In the foreground were grouped the mother and her children, their childish upturned faces expressive of rapt attention as she read to them the well-worn volume. It was the "Lives of the Saints," inscribed in the old black letter type—a type unintelligible to the children, but with which she, of an older generation, was familiar. With hands roughened by toil, she held the bulky volume, and as she read, the children drank in those tales of heroic love and sacrifice of

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men and women of an earlier day whose deeds have been set down in the Great Book of Life because they strove, not for worldly honour or glory, but for better and more lasting things.

How vividly this reading impressed itself on the minds of the children may be gathered from their early attempts at asceticism. They not only desired, but seriously tried to imitate the hermits of the desert, and to emulate the example of such men as St. Anthony, the anchorite. Of course there were obstacles. There always are in any great enterprise, and their first difficulty was to find a convenient desert. Alas! Belgium is not rich in deserts. This lack might have discouraged less earnest seekers, but Damien and his party decided to make the best of things. Accordingly they dispensed with a desert and chose instead a leafy copse. This they entered, satchels in hand—for they were on their way to the village school when “the call” came—and straightway, without any hesitation or wavering, pressed forward into the woody solitude to devote their lives to prayer and

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contemplation. Each child knelt down beneath an arching canopy of green, and with quaint gravity vowed himself to a life of silence and reflection. It was tiresome, of course, that the hidden brook babbled away among the shallows, splashing and laughing as it ran. And it was a distraction, too, that the birds kept on singing, seemingly bent on outdoing each other. As a seven-year-old hermit Damien found the ascetic life somewhat difficult, though with characteristic energy he braced himself up, determined to shut out these subtle wiles of earth.

At noon, the satchels were opened, and each child ate his frugal repast with becoming gravity. Dinner over, the party remained plunged in meditation until the shadows lengthened and the sun dropped low on the horizon. But, alas ! at this moment they were discovered by a passer by, who shepherded them home to bed, and the small truants, and would-be saints, divested of their crowns of glory, were soon asleep under the paternal roof they thought to have quitted for ever.

On another occasion, when the absence

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of the youthful Damien, who had been missing since morning, began to cause anxiety in the home circle, he was sought in the village church, but was not to be found there.

It so happened, however, that there was a *Kermesse*, or annual fair, in a neighbouring village. And as the Flemish fair usually synchronises with the patronal feast of the village church, the *Kermesse* is an event of two-fold importance. The fair lasts three days, and from miles around the country folk pour in, all in their Sunday-best. Every man wears a clean linen smock ; and some of the women a neat black frock trimmed with jet, which is further set off by a bright kerchief at the neck. Others, scorning such modern finery, prefer the cosy Flemish cloak, with its gathered hood of shiny black satin. These wearers of cloaks are true daughters of the land and supporters of ancient tradition, a fact which is further established by the snowy frilled caps which frame their rosy smiling faces. And how quaintly demure the Flemish children look ! They too wear long black cloaks which hang

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in stiff Dutch folds about them, while shining plaits of brown hair, neatly pinned above the nape of each small neck, and black jet bonnets give a touch of elderly dignity to their childish figures.

Clatter, clatter, clatter, go the clogs, as the peasants hurry to the fair. The cobble stones ring with the noise of the crowd : the village square is agog ; booths and side-shows ; stalls of fancy gingerbread ; shooting galleries ; trestle-tables piled with the much-prized *gauffres*, or *Kermesse* dainties, straight from the griddle ; tents of mystery, wrestlers, fortune-tellers, monstrosities, human and otherwise, all are there.

And while the showmen are bawling their wares the village band, with distended cheeks and wildly goggling eyes—usual comitants of musical endeavour—march proudly past, amid a perfect blare of discordant sound. No sooner has the band passed, than the music of the roundabout once more gains the ascendant, to the detriment of human nerves.

The scene of happy laughing figures is never still. The peasants, falling into ever

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changing groups, give the impression that the village square is a vast kaleidoscope, and the moving forms, flitting here and there in the sunlight, but part of a preconceived pattern.

In the midst of this babel stands the village church, and every now and again a single figure will detach itself from the noisy crowd and make its way into the quiet sanctuary. Indeed, a constant stream of holiday-makers passes backwards and forwards from the boisterous fun of the fair into the hushed atmosphere of the sacred building. And here, in the half light of that summer evening long ago, Damien was discovered—a solitary little figure close up to the altar.

These glimpses of his childhood, and of his early fervour are not without interest, shadowing forth, as they do, his after-life, so full of that deep religious enthusiasm, without which he could not have accomplished the peculiarly trying duties of his ministry.

As he grew in boyhood, however, he gave less evidence of his future destiny. But he was naturally of a good disposition ; and from his earliest years displayed a love of

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study. At the humble village school there was little scope for his quick acquiring mind—the schoolmaster's learning being meagre, and apparently confined to the “three Rs,” the high water-mark of village requirements.

But if the village school afforded little interest or pleasure, there were happily other joys which lay outside the school-room. Damien was an expert skater, and throughout the long winter months, when every river and canal in Flanders is frozen hard for weeks, and sometimes months together, Damien spent all his leisure time on the ice. Skating was his only sport, but with him it amounted to a passion. Was there an errand to be run, or a message to be delivered, on went the skates, and off flew the willing messenger. And how the icy wind used to blow across the flat level country ! On these days the peasant folk went about shivering, with benumbed fingers scarcely able to grasp their baskets as they trudged along to market.

But to the skilful young skater whose blades skimmed over the face of the ice in

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long quick flashes, the keenness of the wind added but a fillip to his energies. To Damien, the soft gliding sound of the skates on the frozen canal came as music to his ear. What mattered it, if the icy blast hurried along in a clear sweep off the sky line ? On, on, he sped with flying feet, putting mile after mile behind him, while the tall elms scudded quickly past like a battalion in retreat. Above him was the clear blue of the Belgian sky, and all around lay the silent fields of virgin snow.

But skating could not last for ever, and when the winter months were passed, Damien's mind became again a prey to regrets. His wish was to obtain a good education and perhaps, later on, to study for the priesthood. But the wish just then was deemed a matter of regret in the peasant household, where ways and means had to be considered.

Only quite recently the eldest son had been given to the Church. The parents could not spare both sons, therefore it was judged necessary that Damien should remain at home to help in the field work, and by

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his daily toil bring in the much needed grist to the mill.

So the months passed in which Damien busied himself, not only in digging and planting, but in every kind of manual work. With his sturdy limbs and vigorous mind he scarcely knew what fatigue meant. And his work never lacked variety. If there was any carting to be done, Damien did it, and after a day in the fields, hoeing turnips or digging potatoes, he would turn his attention to other labours. Was there a gate to be mended, Damien volunteered. Had a fence to be painted, a shed built, a sick cow tended, Damien was ready for the work. Such was the versatility of the boy's nature that he was equal to any emergency. He could literally put his hand to anything.

But however willing he was to throw himself into the duties of his life on the farm, it was noticeable that his higher nature still yearned for other spheres of work. In truth, his way lay apart from the cornfields ; and after much thought and anxious consideration, his parents decided that he should continue his studies.

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He was accordingly sent to a school at Braine-le-Comte in the Walloon district, that he might have greater opportunities for acquiring a knowledge of French. This relief gave Damien a new lease of life. It promised the realisation of the dream deep hidden in the secret places of his heart. Some schoolboys find lessons tedious. Damien felt as if he could never learn enough. The desire of knowledge was a passion with him. The more he fed it the stronger it grew. His classmates were apt sometimes to lag behind, but Damien had always to be held back. So things continued until the time approached for him to leave school, and then a more serious difficulty presented itself ; Damien's mind was now made up. He would follow in his brother's steps ; the foreign mission was calling him.

But how could he follow the call ? His parents still needed him ; perhaps now more than ever. Without their consent he felt that he could never enter the priesthood, and in all probability that consent would be refused to him. Damien's fears were realised. His parents listened patiently and

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sympathetically to his arguments, but they considered that, having already given one son to the ministry, they were entitled to keep the other, whom they needed not only then, but as a help and support in the years to come. This attitude of his parents must have wrung Damien's heart, for his love of home and family was deep, and ended only with his life.

On the other hand, Damien felt convinced that this desire to devote himself to the foreign mission did not come from himself. To him the call was as certainly divine as that which the infant Samuel heard of old, in the night watches. Therefore his answer was as Samuel's, but like Samuel, he had perforce to bide his time. Indeed, it was only after long waiting and earnest prayer that Damien obtained his heart's desire. For even when the parents had given their consent they delayed indefinitely to set him free.

Things were in this unsatisfactory condition when Damien's father, having business to transact in the town of Louvain, suggested that his son should accompany him. Nothing

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loth, Damien agreed, and it was arranged that while M. De Veuster attended to his business affairs in the town, Damien should visit his brother Pamphile, who was then a Church student at the Seminary for Foreign Missions.\*

The brothers accordingly met, with the result that Damien applied there and then to the Seminary authorities, for permission to join the Community. His request was granted. Therefore, instead of returning home that evening to take a last farewell of those he loved, Damien decided to save his home-circle the grief of a formal leave-taking and remained within the Seminary walls.

So his father returned alone to Tremeloo, leaving Damien on the threshold of his new life.

\* Congregation des Sacrées-Cœurs, otherwise known as the Picpus Fathers.

## CHAPTER III

### AT THE OUTER GATE

WHEN Joseph De Veuster, at the age of eighteen, put on the religious habit at Louvain, he gave up his family name, taking in its stead that of his patron St. Damian—a name which he was destined to make still more famous.

In joining the community, his ambition was to enter the priesthood. But owing to his ignorance of Greek and Latin, his superiors decided that he could not take orders. It was therefore in the humble capacity of a lay-brother, of a hewer of wood and a drawer of water, that Damien took his place among the community ; and it was in the willing performance of such menial duties as fell to his share, that Damien first pressed his feet upon the royal road.

Accustomed to the heavy work of the fields, he made light of his household duties,

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always contriving, indeed, to take to himself more than his share ; and while he worked he seemed to inspire his companions with his own cheerfulness and good humour. Damien was never dull ; neither did he know an idle moment.

Sometimes his brother Pamphile used to seek him out, and, to relieve the tedium of his brother's toil, formed the habit of reading aloud, while Damien worked. The book chosen was a Latin grammar, extracts from which the lay-brother took pleasure in repeating and committing to memory. Begun simply as a pastime, these impromptu lessons attracted the attention of his Superior, who inquired into his progress. The result was that the question of Damien's ordination was re-considered, and before long the erstwhile lay-brother found himself among the aspirants to the priesthood.

Damien's joy was now full. His days were spent in study and prayer, and, in the exercise of his new duties, his character acquired new strength.

He had indeed come into his own, and in the quiet peace of the Seminary Chapel he

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passed his happiest hours, and sometimes, when the permission was granted, prolonged his vigil far into the night.

The life of a novice is by no means an easy one. On the contrary, it is full of those humiliations and discouragements by which a man's stability is tested, his fitness gauged, and his mind trained to have just that patience with his own shortcomings, as, in after years, he would need in dealing with the faults of others. Damien learned these lessons well.

"Do you know," once said de Lamennais, "why man is the most suffering among creatures? It is because he has one foot in the finite and the other in the infinite, and that he is torn asunder, not by four horses, as in certain horrible times, but between two worlds." This being so, it is but natural that in no place is this suffering more keenly felt than in a religious house, where the cultivation of the higher perceptions gives birth to that feeling of Divine discontent, which, did we but know it, stands as a substitute for that which was lost in the world's dawn, and which is to-day the

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most precious heritage left to the children of men. What wonder then, that the novice, whose soul is tempered to an appreciation of that wisdom which is not of earth, whose eyes seek the Hidden Ways and to whom such mysteries are revealed as it is not given to humanity to utter—what wonder then, if he stretch out vain hands towards the All-Perfect, and with a bitter cry, pray in the words of St. Paul, that he may be delivered from the body of this death ?

Like the eagle, which was created to spread its wings in the vast empyrean, and which, newly snared, strains at the chain that binds him to earth, while, with impotent yearning, he longs to wing his way upwards with glad pinions outstretched—even so, does the ardent soul who has cast off fleshly trammels, burn with intense desire to be lifted up, that he too, in the plenitude of grace, may mount ever higher and higher.

Not that Damien frittered away his time in unfruitful regrets. He had too much respect for life to waste it. Life, in his judgment, was given for a definite purpose, each man's duty being to fulfil the end for which he was

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made. And since no one else can accomplish that particular work which each man is appointed to do, it becomes the more necessary for the individual soul to learn its individual mission.

Therefore, during the period of the novitiate, it was Damien's chief care to try and learn what his life's work was to be. And, as he sat outside the gate whence all wisdom flows, straining his ears to catch a whisper from within, it seemed as if he heard a voice in the listening silence. It was a voice of marvellous sweetness, so soft, so low, yet of such power that he thought it filled all space, making the heavens to thrill again.

"I came to cast fire on the earth," said the voice, "and what will I, but that it be enkindled."

Then with a throbbing heart of gladness, the young Levite bowed his head in acceptance of the trust. This was a promise of servitude, a ratification of his hope that in the not far distant future he might be chosen to carry the glad tidings to those that dwelt afar ; when, with the seal of the priesthood imprinted on his soul, and, in his hand the

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torch of burning charity, he should be sent forth as the Lord's ambassador to fire the cresset of the cross where the shadows lay thickest. Nay, might it not be reserved for him—yea, even for him—to spend himself, body and soul, in humble imitation of that apotheosis of charity which found its consummation on the dread hill of Calvary ?

So Damien prayed for length of days and for the loan of the future years, wherein he might be a lamp to the feet that stumble and a guide to those that stray.

Not in a day do men grow great ; nor is the saint made perfect in an hour. The tiny rivulet that draws its strength from the heart of the distant ranges, trickling unseen through the tangled fern and the sheltering grasses, gathering force and intensity as it goes, both from the night's rain and the morning's dew, is only mindful of the one thing necessary, namely, to respond to the summons of immensity and become absorbed in the might of the ocean into which all streams flow. Such is the way of man's spirit, whose life is the breath of God. " For the earth is gathered up in man : he

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is the whole which is greater than the sum of its parts." Nay, more : "having his roots in the dark places of the earth, but his branches in the sweet airs of heaven," is he not greater than a myriad worlds ?

Remembering this, have we not the right to expect great things from humanity, but more particularly from those whose minds from early infancy have been familiar with the deeds of the dead who have fought the good fight and have gone to their exceeding great reward ?

But the spirit of generosity and the sacrifice of self need to be daily fostered and exercised, if they are to be of use in times of emergency. The sudden act of bravery which proclaims the hero, the flash of reckless daring which makes the human pulse beat faster, is not the result of a moment's thought and quick decision. It is the natural and logical sequence of a man's life. It is, consciously or unconsciously, the result of years of preparation—the final and tangible victory over one's objective self. Such is the evolution of character which James Lane Allen describes as "arising silently within us,

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built up out of a myriad nameless elements beginning at the very bottom of unconsciousness, growing as from cell to cell, atom to atom, the mere dust of victorious experience : the hardening deposits of the ever living, ever rising will, until at last, based on eternal quietude below, and lifting its wreath of palms above the waves of life, it stands finished, indestructible, our inward rock of defence against every earthly storm."

Like all great men, Damien built up the structure of his soul during those hidden years when he lived unknown to the world. And when, his noviciate over, he entered the University of Louvain for his course of philosophy, there was little to distinguish him from the many other Church students whose life ambition was similar to his own. By degrees, however, his greater aptitude, as well as his energy and dogged perseverance in mastering a difficult subject, made him a man of mark, and one who was likely to take a responsible position in the ranks of scholastic teachers—a career confidently predicted for him by those under whom he studied.

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As for Damien, he concerned himself not at all as to what the future might hold. Neither the past nor the future was his, but only the present. Therefore whatever his hands found to do, that he did with all his might.

It was about this time that a party of young missionaries had been chosen from the Community at Louvain for apostolic work in the Sandwich Islands. Among these was Damien's brother, who had recently been ordained. But no sooner had the latter begun to make his preparations for departure, than he was struck down by a serious illness. This misfortune was a heavy trial to the ardent young missionary, who, apart from a feeling of personal disappointment, was also concerned for the inconvenience his failure was likely to entail upon others. To toss about on a sick bed when there is work afoot, to see the chance of a lifetime slip by, and to know there is no substitute available to fill the gap—these things constitute a form of suffering known only to those who have experienced them.

Damien happened to be in the sick room

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one day when Pamphile gave expression to his regrets. "What if I went instead?" asked Damien. The suggestion was characteristic in its impulsiveness and its blunt directness. Nor was his brother unwilling, so Damien straightway took paper and ink and wrote to the Superior General in Paris.

He was not yet ordained, consequently without a signal exception being made in his favour, the proposal was not likely to be endorsed. Yet it is ever the unlikely that happens, and two days later Damien received word that he had been included among the chosen band.

His preparations were quickly made, for the party was about to sail. On November 1, 1863, they set out, and one hundred and thirty-nine days later put into port at Honolulu.

On his arrival, he went into retreat for the space of two months, where, in silence and solitude, he prepared himself for the responsibilities which were soon to be his. At the end of the retreat, on May 22, he was ordained priest, his first Mass being celebrated on Trinity Sunday.

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“There is something inexpressibly beautiful,” says Michael Fairless, “in the unused day—something beautiful in the fact that it is still untouched, unsoiled. . . .” The same may well be said of the human soul ; and the glimpse we get of Damien during that first Mass, when, by the power of the spoken word, he recognised his Redeemer—seeing Him face to face in the Breaking of Bread—is a spiritual scene of rare beauty. So too is his attitude of reverential awe when he distributed, for the first time, the Living Manna to those who had erstwhile dwelt in the wilderness, but who now with clearer vision, and souls newly purged from the dross of earth, are clothed in white as a symbol of their redemption.

Thus did Damien, at the early age of twenty-three, join the ranks of those whose life work it is to seek and to save that which was lost.

## CHAPTER IV

### MISSIONARY WORK IN THE ARCHIPELAGO

**I**T was in the Island of Hawaii, the largest of the Sandwich Islands, that Damien first laboured as a missionary. His flock were simple kindly folk, among whom he continued to work for the space of nine years.

At first he was given charge of the parish of Puna, but, hearing that a brother missionary was breaking down from over-work in the larger district of Kohala, Damien asked and obtained leave for an exchange, thus taking upon his own shoulders those more strenuous duties which he fulfilled so faithfully throughout the years he spent at Hawaii.

It was a time of unceasing toil and unremitting hardships. But to the young missionary whose only desire was to spread

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the glad tidings in every corner of his district, these privations counted but little. Sometimes in his letters to the brethren at Louvain he makes a passing reference to the discomforts of his daily life, but after any such reference—and as if ashamed of having made it—he hurries on to the consideration of those better things which constituted his reward, as for instance : “ how often during the past three months have I been led, as it were by accident, to some tiny cabin, hidden away in the loneliness, where some dying man would seem to have kept death at bay until my coming ; and then, with the waters of baptism still glistening on his fevered brows, he has gone hence, in answer to the great summons.”

During the first years of his missionary labours in the Archipelago he writes frequent letters home, in which he gives glimpses of his life in the island. Writing in the year 1864, he said : “ I have plenty of cares and troubles, my dear parents, still I am very happy. Our Bishop has just made over to me a new parish, a little larger than that of Tremeloo ! It takes me quite a month to

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get round it. Here we cannot travel by rail, or by carriage, or on foot." This difficulty of transit compelled Damien to purchase a horse and a mule, for which horse he paid one hundred francs, the mule costing seventy-five francs. With these two mounts, he was able to travel about at his ease.

"The islanders rejoice," he says, "when they see *Kamiano* and me coming. I like them immensely, and would willingly give my life for them. . . . So I do not spare myself when it is a question of going to visit the sick, or any other persons seven or eight leagues distant."

Indeed this parish of Kohala appears to have been considerably larger than he would have his parents think, his wish being to save them anxiety by minimising his burden and the responsibility that went with it. But to his brother Pamphile he writes more freely.

"Truly," he asserts, "I ought to be proud of my district, for it is as large as the whole diocese of Malines." That the duties were no sinecure may be gathered by the accompanying extract taken from the "Life and

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Letters of Damien,"\* in which the English author gives the following account. The passage is quoted at length, in view of its vivid reality.

"One day [Damien] arrived on horseback at the foot of a high and steep mountain, behind which he remembered there was a Christian settlement, not yet visited by him. Determined to visit it now, he tethered his horse and began the ascent, climbing up on his hands and feet owing to the steep nature of the path. The summit reached, he found himself on the side of a precipitous ravine, which lay yawning at his feet. No human habitation could he see, but in the distance a second mountain as high as the first one met his undaunted gaze. Without hesitation he commenced the descent and courageously began to make his way up the second hill in the same manner as the former. But what was his disappointment when he had gained the summit ! There was no sign of a church or village to encourage him. Below him he saw a large piece of flat country, and beyond

\* "Life and Letters of Father Damien," Catholic Truth Society, London.

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that still, another hill. Any ordinary man would have turned back in despair, but one with a spirit like his whose aim was the saving of souls, could not be so easily daunted." Accordingly, "he persevered in his journey over the third mountain and then another ravine, till he had to stop from sheer fatigue. His hands were now torn and lacerated and the blood flowed freely ; his feet too were wounded, for the boots that should have protected them were cut and rendered almost useless by the hard treatment they had received. As he looked upon his blood-stained hands and feet, he gained courage, and calling to mind the sufferings of Our Lord, he said, 'Courage ! the good God also has shed his blood for those souls yonder !' He started again on his labour of love, and when at last, travel-worn and exhausted, he reached his destination, he was well repaid by the Christians, who welcomed, for the first time, their new found Apostle."

Up to comparatively recent times, Hawaii was entirely pagan. Kamehameha the First, however, was a progressive ruler. It was he

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who abolished the system of caste, or *tabu*, in his tiny kingdom, bringing the Sandwich Islands within reach of a higher civilisation. Under the old-time system "it was death for a man to let his shadow fall upon a chief. . . . No woman might eat with her husband." Neither might she eat any of those things which were offered to idols, such as "fowl, pork, cocoanut, or bananas." For breaking these laws, the culprit was punished with death. So too, if a man disturbed public worship by making an unseemly noise, he was executed. Another custom which must have tended to make the mason's craft unpopular, was, that on the completion of a native temple, one or more of the workmen had to be offered up in sacrifice. "Infanticide was a common practice; maniacs were stoned to death. Old people were buried alive or left to perish. There was no written language. . . ."

Such was the state of Hawaii when the first missionaries arrived in the year 1820. A new king was then sitting on the throne who was prepared to extend a welcome to the strangers. No sooner therefore had the

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band of devout Congregationalists taken possession of their official quarters than a signal honour was paid them. The king and his five wives came to visit them.

The royal party, it appeared, had gone down to bathe that morning, and, while so engaged, conceived the idea of paying their duty-call without further delay. Accordingly they stepped out of the sea, and so—into the Congregational presence.

The painful sense of shock with which their hosts received them may be better imagined than described. And it would seem that the missionaries went so far as to protest at the absence of raiment, urging that the occasion called for greater state—a point of view which seemingly appealed to the king's sense of fitness, for in his subsequent visits to the mission-house he was careful to draw on the royal stockings, as a delicate concession to Western ideas plus Christian prejudice.

Later on, a native chieftainess became a convert to Christianity—the same Kapiolani who in 1824 broke the spell which hung over the great volcano, the supposed home

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of the terrible goddess Pele. Kapiolani has been described by Edward Clifford\* as "marching with her retinue across the plains of lava till she reached the lake of fire. Then she flung into it the sacred ohelo berries and defied Pele to hurt her. There was a horror-stricken silence ; but no calamity followed." This bold action on the part of Kapiolani is supposed to have done much to break down the superstition which formed the basis of the former cult.†

It was not until 1839 that Catholicism was introduced into the Archipelago, since which date the Church of England has also established different mission centres.

The Sandwich Islands being of volcanic origin earthquakes are not uncommon, while the frequent eruptions of the burning mountain Kilanea form a lurid background to life in Hawaii.

\* Edward Clifford's "Father Damien."

† A charming account of the heroism of this first Christian chieftainess and of the part she took in breaking down the old-time prejudices of the Hawaiian people is set down in Tennyson's poem "Kapiolani."

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Edward Clifford describes the volcano as follows. The crater, he says, is "round like a cup, and is about three hundred feet in diameter (as large as a small circus). Its rim is about ten feet high, and it is full of boiling lava. The lava is as liquid as thick soup, and of a bluish grey colour, with occasional greenish tints. It keeps simmering and heaving, and then it breaks in all directions into most lovely vermillion cracks, changing into violet and then into dead grey. Nearly all round the edge it shows scarlet, and tosses up waves which are not unlike the waves of the sea, only they are red hot, and the spray is the colour of coral or of blood. Above them there is often a beautiful lilac or violet effect. This violet atmosphere of the fire is one of the loveliest of the phenomena. Sometimes the edge of the volcano gets undermined with its fiery waves, and topples over with a crash, and all the time a roaring sound goes on like the roaring of the sea. And now, as one watches, one suddenly sees a scarlet fountain beginning to play in the middle of the lake. At first it is about two feet high, with golden spray, then it

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gets wilder and larger and more tumultuous, tossing itself up into the air with a beautiful kind of sportiveness—great twistings of fiery liquid are springing high into the air, like serpents and griffins. . . .”

Damien had now been in Hawaii four years. That they were not uneventful may be seen by the letter (undated) which he writes about this time.

### “ HAWAII.

“ MY DEAR PARENTS.—It is now more than two years since I received any news of you, either from yourselves or my brothers. Pauline and Auguste have, however, written to me lately. . . .

“ As for me, my dear Parents, I am quite well, and very happy in the office which the Lord has entrusted to me. My duties will be somewhat lighter now than in past years, as a priest has come to help me and labour with me in my immense parish, which extends over twenty leagues. In the four years I have been here, I have built four new Churches and repaired one old one. I myself had to do the work of a carpenter. I have still one or two Chapels to build in

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my parish, and then we can live more comfortably. Last year I succeeded in bringing into the right path about sixty heathens, to whom I administered Baptism. . . .

“Last year we had some very violent earthquakes here, caused by the gaseous vapours from the volcano. More than thirty men were killed by the eruption of the volcano, and about forty by a great wave which broke on the land with such force that no one had time to escape. An entire village, with a newly built stone Church, was destroyed by the inundation. The roofs of two other stone Churches fell in, in consequence of the earthquake.

“Leprosy is beginning to be very prevalent here. There are many men covered with it. It does not cause death at once, but it is very rarely cured. The disease is very dangerous, because it is highly contagious. The population of our islands consists of some sixty-two thousand at present. It was larger formerly. There are in all twenty-one priests in different parts of the islands. The island where I am, is larger than all the others together. Here there

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are seven priests who serve about twenty Churches and, I think, about one third of the population are Catholics, and the rest are either Protestants or pagans.

“ Do not forget, my dear parents, to pray for me every day ; there are so many dangers here for both soul and body.

“ Your affectionate son,

“ JEF. DE VEUSTER.” \*

From a reference in the above, it is clear that news came but seldom from Tremeloo. Yet in spite of his busy missionary life, and in spite of his absorbing duties and his arduous labours, Damien’s love of home would seem to have grown even stronger with the years.

For never, surely, was Tremeloo so dear to the heart of Damien as it was in the loneliness of his exile. He could see it all so plainly : the little Flemish village where his own folk lived ; he could see the shadows gathering in the quiet graveyard beside the old grey church ; and when the Angelus

\* “ Life and Letters of Father Damien,” Catholic Truth Society, London.

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rang out across the fields, he fancied he could catch the whispered prayer as his father stood and bared his head in the silence.

However busy his day might be, Damien's mind found time to think of those who were dear to him, and though his letters home were few and far between, they always breathe the same strong spirit of filial love, as witness the following letter :

“ KOHALA, HAWAII,  
“ *October 12, 1869.*

“ MY DEAR PARENTS,—I have at length received your welcome letter. For a long time I have been distressed and in suspense about you, not knowing what might have happened. I learn to my great joy that you are in good health. As for me, thanks be to God, I am very well ; I have never been ill since I have been here. My duties are always the same. In this last year I have built two new Churches, one of which I have handed over to another priest, together with half of my vast district, so that my work is a bit easier. At present I have three Churches

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to serve, at fifteen miles distance from one another. I say Mass at each in turn on Sundays. The last Church I built is a fine looking building with a nice little tower. I am still waiting for the bell that Auguste has so often promised me, but it never comes. Apart from the manual labour which I furnish almost entirely myself, this wooden Church has cost me about four thousand francs. After spending my last farthing, I was still four hundred francs in debt, but Providence came to my aid. As there is no bell yet, we call our people together with a horn.

“Continue to pray for the conversion of these heathen. Perhaps it is in consequence of your prayers, that God has granted me the conversion of the forty or fifty pagans and heretics whom I have baptized this last year. The best way to render our prayers acceptable to God is to purify our conscience by the Sacrament of Penance, and to live always in His fear. I am myself exposed here to many dangers of body and soul. But knowing that I can do nothing of my own strength, I put my confidence in Our

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Lord, Who has accepted my service, and nourishes me daily with His Body and Blood in the Holy Sacrifice. It is moreover a great consolation to me to offer Mass now and then for my dear parents, my brothers and sisters.

“You must not be surprised, my dear father, that our natives here use neither spoons nor forks, neither chairs nor tables. It is the custom to eat with their fingers, and to sit on the ground; but they have nice mats in their houses to sit on. It is the same thing in the Church. At first I made benches for them, but they would not use them, and I find it much more economical. On Sundays they are generally well dressed, but on week days they go half naked. The native population is continually decreasing.

“Write me as soon as you can and give me a little more news. How many children have Léonce and Gérard? What has become of the mill?

“Your affectionate son,

“JOSEPH.” \*

\*.“Life and Letters of Father Damien,” Catholic Truth Society, London.

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Throughout his correspondence to his own people, there is the same affectionate interest in the small affairs of home and the trivialities of everyday life. Sometimes he writes to warn them against some projected business scheme which he thinks unwise; at other times his letter contains a suggestion for the more frequent reception of the Sacraments; for he would have them better than good.

A letter to his sister Pauline, now a nun at Uden in Holland, further accentuates the human side of Damien's character, and seems to recall the evenings of their childhood, when he and she sat together in the glancing firelight, and drank in from their mother's lips those tales of love and daring with which the saints of old linked world with world, and by wondrous acts of sacrifice climbed up from earth to heaven. This letter, written in 1872, is the last of those from Hawaii, for the time was now approaching when Kohala would see him no more. So far, however, he is unconscious of what the near future holds in store.

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“ KOHALA, HAWAII,  
“ *July 14, 1872.*

“ MY DEAR SISTER PAULINE,—Three years now, and not a line from you. Where are you then, my dear sister? Are you off to Heaven already? Not so fast, if you please. A little more time is wanted to win that Crown. Take pity, then, on your poor brother, who by dint of being so long forgotten, will become a regular savage among savages. Well, I certainly love my savages, who will soon be more civilised than Europeans. They all here know how to read and write, and are quite well dressed on Sundays. I have in my own district, which contains three thousand souls, four chapels built of wood, very neat, where I say Mass in turn on Sundays. I endeavour to instruct my people as well as I can, especially the chief men who take my place in my absence, hold meetings on Sundays, and preach. Visiting the sick is my chief daily task. We have to fight their doctors who are generally nothing but sorcerers. In cases of sickness, idolatrous sacrifices are still in use. All diseases are attributed to

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mysterious causes. It is very hard to disabuse these poor people of such superstitious notions. Still by dint of preaching and watching over them, especially when sick, I have hopes that a good many of my flock die in good dispositions. They are always glad to receive the last Sacraments. Death carries off in these islands more in a year than are brought into life ; so the native population is continually diminishing. At present there are about sixty thousand natives in our group of islands. Our mission goes on fairly well ; we are twenty-five priests in all, with Churches everywhere. We do our best to hold our own against the Protestants. Our Sisters beat them with their girls' school ; but as regards the education of the boys, they beat us. Our priestly duties occupy us too much for us to keep schools. There should be Brothers for that duty. A few months back, we had two terrible hurricanes. The first, in the couple of hours that it lasted, smashed a hundred houses. The second lasted three days. My chapels stood it well : two in the neighbouring district were blown away. I play

## DAMIEN OF MOLOKAI

the carpenter when necessary, and have a good deal of work in painting and decorating my chapels. In general I have much bother and little consolation ; and it is only by God's grace that I find my yoke sweet and my burden light. When I get a little unwell, I congratulate myself that the end is near ; but I am content with my lot, only let perseverance crown my work.

“ Let us be in the hands of God as tools in the hands of a skilful workman. Whether in life or death, we belong to Jesus. Pray for me.

“ DAMIEN.” \*

\* “ Life and Letters of Father Damien,” Catholic Truth Society, London.

## CHAPTER V

### GATHERING CLOUDS

BUT clouds fraught with misfortune for the Sandwich Islands were massing on the horizon. At first no bigger than a man's hand, the herald patch drifted up from the vague, and was quickly followed by others. Silent and sinister they joined together, then with arms outstretched and with scarce a cry of warning, they flung down a pall of sorrow which covered every island in the Archipelago. Thus, before the people were conscious of their danger, the storm broke, carrying all before it. There was no escape ; the victims of disease were swept along like straws in the eddying stream. Homes were broken up and families scattered; husbands were torn from wives ; children were wrested from their mothers' arms ; young men and maidens were struck down and forced to part. Neither old nor young

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were spared ; neither age, nor sex, nor condition. The blow fell alike on the innocent and the guilty. Like a hurricane the scourge came down upon the islands, and in its wake rose a sound of wailing. It was a cry which struck terror into the heart, for it told of the loved ones who had been driven out, to meet a fate that was worse than death.

It is now nearly sixty years since the plague of leprosy first appeared in the Sandwich Islands. Once established, the disease spread rapidly, the extraordinarily sociable habits of the islanders lending wings to the infection.

In Hawaii the spirit of hospitality is paramount. The passing stranger has only to enter a native dwelling to be reckoned a bosom friend. From henceforth he is made free of the cabin and of all it contains. The Hawaiian knows no half measures. He will share his last crust with his guest. Nay, is not his well-seasoned pipe passed from hand to hand, and may not the necessitous wayfarer enjoy the full half of his host's sleeping mat ?

## GATHERING CLOUDS

And among the women, will not the sick and the sound borrow and lend the well-used garment, with a superb contempt for the laws of hygiene? In view of these things it is not surprising that leprosy should have won its way into the islands, disputing possession of the little kingdom with its lawful sovereign.

Therefore the local government, suddenly roused to the urgency of the case, resolved upon immediate action. A law was accordingly passed, by which it was ordained that every leper, irrespective of his social standing or position, was to repair forthwith to the Island of Molokai, there to spend the years that remained to him.

To the easy-going Hawaiian, who had grown familiar with the disease in the person of his friends, the blow fell with unexpected suddenness. It sent a chill to his heart. From henceforth the leper was not only a sick man, but a felon, and to his physical suffering must be added the greater pain of exile. No longer might he indulge in those friendly acts of social intercourse, the confidences exchanged in the open doorways,

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the quiet pipe under the trees, the laughing words bandied in the sunlight—these things were denied him for ever.

Generous, light-hearted, irresponsible—a people of laughter and tears, unconcerned with what the morrow may hold, the Hawaiians live entirely in the present. Life to them is full of the warmth and scent of the tropics. It is a wondrous world of colour and of dreams. Robert Louis Stevenson, who knew the South Seas better perhaps than any other European writer, gives in his “Letters”\* some vivid glimpses of the different island groups which are dotted about the broad Pacific. And in those Letters he sets down, with the pen of a master, the characteristics of the islanders—their vices and their virtues, their failings and their kindly traits, which together form a fascinating study in native psychology.

Sometimes he tells of weird happenings and strange adventures; now his letters come up from the blue troughs of the sea; now he writes from some obscure island capital; or else he takes up his pen while

\* “Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson,” vol. ii.

## GATHERING CLOUDS

visiting one of those low-lying atolls, built up out of the frail coral, which may outlast the centuries or disappear in a night ; for in the Pacific, human life is largely dependent on the good pleasure of the deep.

And how refreshing are his accounts of his journeyings, as, for instance, when he camped at Apemama, and lived on salt junk and cocoanut, with a king for his guest.

And this king, as depicted by Stevenson, is not like other kings. Tembinoka, says R. L. S., "is a great character—a thorough tyrant, very much of a gentleman, a poet, a musician, a historian, or perhaps rather a genealogist. It is strange to see him lying in his house . . . writing the history of Apemama in an account book ; his description of one of his own songs, which he sang to me himself, as about sweethearts, and trees and the sea—and 'no true, all-the-same-lie,' seems about as compendious a definition of lyric poetry as a man can ask."

It is probably because the royal scribe counted Stevenson as a brother in the craft, that he condescended to share his repast of the salt junk and the cocoanut. This he

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did as often as he could spare the time from his kingly duties. But when the cares of a kingdom prevented it, he despatched the royal cook to fetch away the royal share ; for the white light that is said to beat about a throne, appears to have inconvenienced none at the court of Apemama.

Writing still from the Gilbert Islands (which are not so far from the Sandwich group), Stevenson says : "the beech-comber is perhaps the most interesting character here : the natives are very different on the whole from Polynesians : they are moral, stand-offish (for good reasons) and protected by a dark tongue. It is delightful to meet the few Hawaiians (mostly missionaries) that are dotted about, with their Italian *brio*, and their ready friendliness." And as giving a background and a local atmosphere to life in the Pacific—an atmosphere which is not peculiar to any one group of islands, but is common to most, Stevenson proceeds to outline the following picture, in which he gives place to that wonderful colouring which goes to make up the freshness and charm of the islands.

## GATHERING CLOUDS

"The whites," he says, "are a strange lot, many of them good, kind pleasant fellows ; others quite the lowest I have ever seen in the slums and cities. I wish I had time to narrate to you the doings and characters of three white murderers (more or less proven) I have met. One, the only undoubted assassin of the lot, quite gained my affection in his big home out of a wreck, with his New Hebrides wife in her savage turban of hair, and yet a perfect lady, and his three adorable little girls in Rob Roy MacGregor dresses, dancing to the hand-organ, performing circus on the floor . . . and curling up together on a mat to sleep, three sizes, three attitudes, three Rob Roy dresses and six little clenched fists ; the murderer meanwhile brooding and gloating over his chicks, till your whole heart went out to him ; and yet his crime on the face of it was dark. . . ."

Surely, the tropical sun must have entered into the veins of the beech-combers, until they too, partake of the wilder and more passionate nature to which the stolid Briton is more or less a stranger. For where else, except in the far Pacific, are scenes so

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picturesque, or so paradoxical ; where else does the fire smoulder under an exterior so placid ; where else does it burst forth so suddenly into licence all untrammelled ?

Given normal conditions the native of the Sandwich Islands is happy and law-abiding. But once his environment is changed, once he is hampered and constrained and driven into exile, then the darker side of his nature appears, and his manhood goes. For the Hawaiian is not built to withstand the storm. He is, figuratively speaking, but a light craft fashioned to sail only in a smooth sea.

Yet it was among these frail vessels that the storm broke. It was in the midst of the laughter-loving natives that leprosy rose up like an awful spectre, carrying off in his wake the old and the young, the strong and the weak, and whomsoever he beckoned had perforce to follow.

So, when the government edict went forth and the island of Molokai was named as the State lazaretto, a cry of anguish and despair was heard throughout the Archipelago.

It was an easy thing to promulgate the decree ; the difficulty lay in its execution.

## GATHERING CLOUDS

The lepers were scattered all over the islands, and the one idea of the inhabitants was now to circumvent the authorities. The strong affection which is part and parcel of the Hawaiian nature was roused by the thought of separation. Wives clung to their husbands, and husbands to their wives. It was all in vain : the arm of the law was stronger than the tender bonds of humanity. Sometimes indeed the sick were successfully hidden away in some lonely cabin among the lava beds, some in the nooks and crannies of the hill-side. But even then, the respite was short. Sooner or later the soldiery tracked them down, pursuing them as malefactors to be wrested by force from home and happiness.

The lot of the lepers was indeed pitiable. They were seized and dragged from their hiding-places, their relatives and friends being unable any longer to help them. And as they looked their last on the faces of those dear to them, the air was filled with cries and lamentations. And when the final moment arrived so keen was the sorrow of parting that those who were sound pleaded

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to share the pain of exile with those that were sick. But all their entreaties fell on deaf ears. The lepers must go alone. So they departed amid sounds of bitter grief such as can hardly be gauged by those who have not known their sorrow.

These sights, alas, became all too common in the islands. Every year the roll-call increased. Each district supplied its awful quota, and month by month a new consignment of lepers was carried off to their living tomb at Molokai.

What wonder then, that the heart of Damien De Veuster should have been moved with compassion for these victims of sorrow and disease. How often had he watched them take ship, and go out from amongst the living, never to return. Many of them were known to him ; some were his own parishioners. And into what a pit had they fallen ? Alas ! the lazaretto was a by-word in the ways of iniquity.

It was the thought of the spiritual desolation to which the lepers were exposed that stirred Damien's strong nature : it was the crying need of these human souls that made

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him long to devote himself to the regeneration of the leper colony. But he had to wait until 1873 for his opportunity. It came with the consecration of a new church in the neighbouring island of Mani, to which ceremony Damien had been invited. After the service, at a reception of the assembled missionaries, the Bishop, in the course of conversation, expressed his regret that, owing to the fewness of their numbers and the extent of their work, he was unable to provide for the leper colony whose needs were continually present to his mind.

At the Bishop's words Damien's heart leaped within him, and he immediately volunteered as Chaplain to the lazaretto. But the Bishop demurred. Damien was young; his life was before him; besides, he had his own work at Kohala.

But, as if the Divine seal had already been set upon Damien's sacrifice, the Bishop's objections were suddenly overcome. A party of young missionaries had landed the day before, to help in the work of the islands. Therefore when Damien suggested that his district of Kohala should be transferred to

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one of the new-comers, his request was granted, and on the afternoon of the same day, without making the smallest preparation, and without any farewells, the apostle of the lepers set sail for the island of Molokai.

## CHAPTER VI

### MOLOKAI

**I**T is a little wedge-shaped island, perhaps thirty miles by seven, and it lies in the track of the traders that ply between Sydney and San Francisco.

In the very early morning, before the sun's rays, like a glad host, spread out their wings to herald the coming day, the island rises up in its garment of mist like some beautiful spirit of the deep. Seen thus in the distance, she is all fair, for the diaphanous drapery in which she wraps herself, but half conceals and half reveals the beauty of form beneath, while from her inmost heart gleam those opalescent tints which, like children of the rainbow, come at times to brighten the days of man's exile.

Surely it must have been a vision such as this that the Celtic Sagas describe in the legends of old when they speak of a jewel

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set in the sea, of an island wrapped round in the mists of the dawn—a place of music and enchantment which ever called to the old-time mariners who set sail, not once, but many times, in quest of that land of which their fathers dreamed—Tir-na-nogue. It was the land of everlasting youth ; the island of promise, wherein dwelt the spirits of Truth and of all justice ; the land of Perfect Love and Heavenly Knowledge. It was here, in ages past, when the world was covered with the blight of sin, that the curse of earth was hurled back into the ocean caves, since which time, in the island of Tir-na-nogue, no spirit of evil has dared to enter, for it was a holy land, screened round with the souls of the just and guarded close by shimmering wings.

Alack ! Tir-na-nogue is still to seek, its place being no longer marked on our earthly charts. Nay, is not its very existence scouted by the cynic of to-day, whose eyes are held that he may not see, and whose mind is unable to grasp the substance of things unseen ? But the wise of this world strike their breasts and lament, that

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the Island of Desire was blotted out by the angel on the day when Adam fell.

“What is man that Thou art mindful of him ?” asks the Scriptures in wonder, “and the son of man that Thou shouldst visit him ?” Well might this question be asked by those who draw near to the island of Molokai. With the clearer light of day a change has crept over the land : a change so marked, so horrible, that the traveller would fain rub his eyes and pray that the evil dream might pass. For instead of the white spirit evoked by the enchantress whom men call the Dawn, instead of the spirit whose gentle being breathes a sense of peace, gathering up into itself all that is best of earth, Molokai in the sunlight, looks what it is—a thing accursed. To the outward eye, it seems to be some long-lost land, solitary and drear—a narrow promontory hemmed in by the sea. And behind this stone-strewn waste, a sharp ridge of beetling crags, steep and forbidding, rises high up into the blue as if to cut off human retreat. “It is a pitiful place to visit,” writes Stevenson, “and a hell to dwell in.”

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And what of the people who inhabit the bare acres that lie out at the foot of the cliffs ? Hark ! from among the grey rocks on the grassy plain, a cry of desolation rends the air. Borne along on the breath of the sea, the low-toned wail steals out across the water like an echo of that old-time cry, "Unclean ! unclean !" For, as in the ancient days, so here in the glare of the nineteenth century, the lepers must remain apart. Each is still an outcast and a pariah.

Coming closer to the land we see them in all their horror. They stand out like creatures from some under-world ; so brutalised, so hideous, so awful, that they appear to have lost all semblance of human kind. In and out, they creep among the rocks, for some are weak and ill with disease. Others, whose limbs have dropped off from the rotting joints, crawl along the ground like the brute beasts. Yet in spite of their ever-growing putrefaction, these beings still "live and breathe and remember."

Stevenson, whose pen never faltered in  
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speaking truth, nor drew a false line in description, refers to them as “gorgons and chimæras dire . . . pantomime deformations of our common manhood. Such a population as only now and again surrounds us in the horrors of a nightmare.”\*

Ah God ! what a sight for human eyes to see ; what a fate for the human mind to conceive. Could anything be more terrible, any plight more pitiable ?

Alas, in the Molokai of that day, there were worse things than material corruption, for the moral aspect of the lepers was worse a thousand times than the havoc made by disease.

Of the two thousand souls who had been transported since the year 1865 there remained, at the end of ten years, but eight hundred survivors. And as the lepers marry and are given in marriage it will be judged that, in spite of a certain increase among the population, Death was ever busy in their midst. Of these eight hundred survivors, perhaps two hundred in all were Catholics, the rest being principally Lutherans.

\* See “Letters of R. L. Stevenson,” vol. ii.

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There was at this time one Protestant Chapel served by a native leper, and a little wooden Oratory dedicated to St. Philomena where, from time to time, as occasion offered, the Catholic lepers assembled for worship. Owing to the small number of the Catholic missionaries and the multiplicity of their duties in the other islands, it was only at stated intervals that they could visit the lazaretto. This they did with great regularity, while one of them sometimes came and stayed for the purpose of giving a week's retreat.

But in view of the surroundings of the lazaretto, these efforts of the missionaries were sadly inadequate to the local needs. There was but scant hope in Molokai, consequently men lost heart. As far as the eye could see and the mind imagine there was nothing but the sullen sea and the iron-bound cliffs; and here amid the most deplorable conditions, amounting to social and moral anarchy, the unfortunate lepers were doomed to drag out the remainder of their lives.

What wonder then that they played fast

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and loose with law and order? They were desperate men, who had lost heavily in life's game, and now played to win—at least, on this side of the grave. "Let us eat, drink and be merry," said the denizens of the lazaretto, "for to-morrow we die."

How different from this was the argument of the pagan philosopher of old who, having weighed the possibilities of life both here and hereafter, chose to follow the narrow path as being in itself the better way.

"How then stands the case?" he asks. "Thou hast taken ship, thou hast sailed, thou art come to land. Go out, if to another life, there also shalt thou find gods who are everywhere. If all life and sense shall cease, then shalt thou cease also to be subject to either gains or pleasures; and to serve and tend this vile cottage, so much the viler by how much that which ministers unto it doth excel; the one being a rational substance and a spirit, the other nothing but earth and corruption."

But the lepers were unduly handicapped.

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They were weighed down by suffering and maddened by despair. Therefore they rose in rebellion. And as once before, so here in Molokai, the cry of revolt went forth. *Non serviam!* But oh! how pitiful it sounded from this place of torture, where human strength was well-nigh spent. How unlike that former cry, which before Time was, echoed through the Courts of Majesty, striking dumb the angel choirs. *Non serviam!* Thus was the surly challenge flung down on the floor of heaven by the angel of light, whose punishment it is to linger for ever in the outer darkness; wandering hither and thither in the gloom of a night that knows no dawn.

In Molokai, the words uttered were the same. But here they rose up like a moan. It was a feeble cry that issued from lips made petulant by disease; and so, petulantly they sinned, even while they waited at the brink of eternity. For what did eternity hold in store for the lepers? What terrors had the Pit for those who had already plumbed its depths? Could any torture be new to them who had lived in the

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lazaretto ? Remorse ! Was the remorse of the lost any keener or more bitter than that which tugged at their heart-strings ? Verily, the depths of hell are but the measure of a man's heart.

From the accounts given of the leper settlement as it was before the coming of Damien, it is interesting to note the importance of social science in its relations, not only to the physical well-being of a people, but still more to the public standard of ethics.

In the Molokai of that time, the housing of the lepers was deplorable. It was neither decent nor hygienic. The native dwellings were in fact quite unfit for human habitation. The grass huts were in themselves foul places, but were rendered worse by the habits of the sick. Built without foundations, their walls just rising from the bare ground, which in the wet season became a morass, the cabins were so small and frail as to afford scant shelter from the wind and the rain. Yet this was all the accommodation the lepers had, and it was into these plague-stricken hovels that they had to crowd

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as best they could, men, women, and children irrespective of age, sex, or condition, and all of them eaten up with a loathsome disease.

Added to this, the denizens of Molokai were often in need of the necessities of life. Their rations (supplied by government contract) were extremely poor, and so scanty that the people oftentimes experienced the pangs of hunger. Then again, the water supply was bad and insufficient for their needs, so that in addition to their other misfortunes they were unable to bathe their fevered wounds—a privation which, apart from the cruelty to the individual, contributed considerably to the general virulence of the disorder. Then there was the difficulty of obtaining suitable, warm clothing, which the lepers, being very susceptible to cold, sorely needed.

From this enumeration, which by no means exhausts the social and physical disabilities of the lazaretto, enough has perhaps been said to suggest the conditions under which the lepers lived. Cut off from all healthy society, deprived of home and family,

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without occupation, without interests, without any law, and without religion, it was but natural that they should indulge in every kind of excess. Thus as they sat in their crowded hovels playing cards, they drank greedily of the juice of the ki-tree, after which they cast off the dignity of men and became as beasts. For the juice of the ki-tree is sweet to those who have no hope, and who look not for the final resurrection.

Therefore did corruption reign as overlord in those days, and when each new batch of lepers set foot in the island, the lazaretto was wont to stretch out its awful hand and cry : Here we have no law ! This was the evil welcome extended to the new-comers by the vast majority in Molokai. And as the Molokii lived, so they died. Then a hole was dug in the ground, into which the dead man was flung. That was the end. He had lived and he had died. But life or death, what mattered it ? Either was hell in Molokai. Indeed, the godless attitude of the lepers at this time may almost be described in the words of Francis Thompson :

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I fled Him down the nights and down the days ;  
I fled Him, down the arches of the years ;  
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways

    Of my own mind ; and in the midst of tears  
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.

    Up vistaed hopes, I sped ;  
    And shot, precipitated

    Adown Titanic glooms of chasmèd fears,  
    From those strong Feet that followed, followed  
        after. . . .



Father Damien's preparation for his work.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE COMING OF DAMIEN

DAMIEN'S arrival at Molokai was strikingly characteristic of the man. There was about it that spontaneity, that abruptness, that unerring directness which formed at once his weakness and his strength. Given any particular work to do, his whole being was immediately absorbed in carrying it through, staying not to count the cost, but thinking only of the glorious end of his labours.

Accordingly, having volunteered to serve the lazaretto, he was impatient of delay. Impulsive as ever, he wanted to begin then and there. But there was no steamer leaving that day ; nor even that week. The only craft to be had was an old cattle-boat, due to start in an hour. *Fiat !* Then he would travel by the cattle-boat.

It is this note of personal effacement, this

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fellowship with all created things—for are we not all God's beasts, as St. Augustine says?—it is this recognition and appreciation of that gift of life which is but lent to each for the benefit of all, that places Damien among those spiritual leaders whose more acute perception discerns in the lowest the manifestation of the Highest, and in every man the reflection of the Divine. So Damien, with a score of dumb beasts and fifty lepers, was deposited on the Island of Doom.

We know not what his feelings were as the boat approached the land; but zealous and brave as he was, surely even his stout heart must have sunk at sight of the awful figures that crowded about the landing stage and swarmed up the steps, their vile rags seeming to spurn the poor diseased limbs, leaving them hideously bare to every wind that blew. From henceforth these creatures were to be his comrades and his friends; from this time forth his life was given to them.

An hour later, the cattle-boat weighed anchor, leaving Damien a prisoner and an

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exile on the tiny promontory under the cliffs which formed the lazaretto of Molokai.

He was at this time a young man of thirty-three, lithe of form and comely of feature, endowed with gifts of body and mind, and with a heart whose irrepressible gaiety outlived and defied all the horrors of the lazaretto.

Yet, even while he made his offering, who can gauge the daily, hourly struggle in which the flesh must have made war against the spirit? Who can measure the mental sufferings and temptations, the alternate hope and despair which must have assailed him, especially during those long dreary nights when, having nowhere to lay his head, he cast himself down beneath the solitary pandanus tree, whose waving boughs moaned above him, while close beside tossed the restless sea.

Behind him, there rose up a background fraught with awful possibilities to human frailty, wherein the darkness was peopled with the sights and sounds of sin. Humble and diffident of self, how his soul must have

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recoiled from the realities of the lazaretto ; and how his whole being must have been weighed down with sorrow at the prospect of spending long years among such surroundings. Therefore as a suppliant before the Throne, and in a spirit of self-abasement, he cast himself down on the bare ground and with arms outstretched renewed his offering of youth and health and life.

Well might the world wonder at a sacrifice so unique ; nor is it surprising that the public should desire to know more concerning this hero of charity. Who is this, they ask, who laughs at Death ? Who is this that spurns the world and its pleasant paths ? What manner of man is he—what do men say of him ?

Outwardly he was but a Flemish peasant, rough and brusque—a man poorly clad. His hands are hardened with toil. He is ignorant, as the world counts wisdom, being content with the Truth which embraces all knowledge. But within him is a living, impelling divine force which finds its fruition in deeds of personal service. Though a cleric, he is no metaphysician ; he cares nothing

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for polemics. Intellectual difficulties exist not for him ; they pass over his head like the shifting clouds ; he has the faith that moves mountains. His mind is absorbed in the one thing necessary. His ears are filled with the message of goodwill, which, did we but know it, holds in itself the potentialities of a renewed earth, when, as the Prophet writes, “Every man shall help his neighbour and shall say to his brother : ‘Be of good cheer.’”

“Men are so made,” says a writer of to-day, “that they have a hunger for human sympathy, a need for some one who can heal the bruised spirit, or where the injury is deep, bind up the broken heart.”

This was the task which Damien set himself to do, and, amid all the revolting scenes of which the lazaretto was full, never once did he falter in the performance of deeds of mercy, never once turn a deaf ear to the cry of the afflicted. Indeed, it is not too much to say, that to Damien, every moan that issued from leprous lips was like a call from beyond: “as you do unto these, you do unto Me”—and taking in his hands the way-worn spirit,

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he anointed it tenderly with the oil of gladness.

But Damien did more than this for the lepers. For beneath all his religious enthusiasm lay a basis of sound common sense—being essentially practical, he realised that ethical reforms are largely dependent upon social conditions. Therefore, like every true social reformer, he sought first of all to remove the cause of sin, looking forward to the time when the improved social surroundings would pave the way for a proclamation of the Promises.

As already suggested, the lazaretto needed sweeping reforms. To cope with a situation so desperate, a trained body of men was required—men of sympathy and strong purpose—if the evils of the lazaretto were to be efficiently dealt with. But Damien was alone. He had no one to help him ; none to advise. It was a Herculean task, this cleansing of the Augæan stable, and one which might well have disheartened the boldest. Yet in face of every difficulty Damien never hesitated. His trust was unfailing. Success or failure, what mattered

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the result? Are the riches of the harvest dependent upon the sower of the seed, or is the labourer responsible for the failure of the grain? His part is but to harrow and to plant, and to pray the Lord of the harvest, in Whose hands are the gifts of the earth.

In reviewing the work accomplished in Molokai during the ten years in which he worked single-handed, the student of sociology cannot but be struck by the extent of it. For though his methods may be open to criticism from the modern standpoint, the excellence of his social principles remains unquestionable. Thus while we may discount his lack of organisation (as affecting the minor details of his social work), there is no doubt that he possessed to a very high degree that greater and rarer gift by which he could deal successfully with a grave and widespread evil. And not only did he possess this gift himself, but he was able to inspire others with the noble ambition with which his own soul was filled.

In the hagiography of the Church there are to be found two distinct types of men, each diametrically opposed to the other in

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method, but each making for the same goal. Such are the Compellers and the Moderators. Of these, Ignatius is an example of the Compeller; Polycarp, of the Moderator. Similarly, in studying the great minds of all time, two ideals are again distinguishable, one finding its highest expression in the figure of the Jewish Prophet, who from the highest heaven reaches down to the earth, the other in the Greek philosopher who, by developing and purifying what is best in the mind of man, so raises it until it reaches the very steps of the Throne.

Damien, then, may be ranked among the Compellers, whose magnetic personalities are potent to stir up and to admonish; and whose individual strength and courage, projected across the lethargy of others, so galvanise their dormant faculties as to compel them to active service for the public good.

Side by side with all this social activity he strove to impart the principles of religion, for his attempt to better the material condition of the lepers was but the means to his real objective, namely, their spiritual

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regeneration. To overthrow the gods of the lazaretto, and in their place to set up the Person of the Crucified—it was for this he laboured sixteen long years, and it was for this he died.

The results have shown that his sacrifice was not in vain, but such results were not achieved without long years of effort and unremitting toil. And it is interesting to see how the simple peasant-priest went to work to establish social order in the midst of chaos, so that in the fulness of time he might the better set up the standard of the Cross.

Hitherto, as already mentioned, the water supply of the settlement was bad as well as insufficient, being carried by hand from a considerable distance. To remedy this, Damien made search in the neighbourhood, and found within a short distance a spring of good water of sufficient volume to supply the needs of the entire community. This fortunate discovery was followed by a petition to the Hawaiian Government for materials to build an aqueduct. This was willingly agreed to by the authorities, and in

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a short time an unlimited supply of water was at the disposal of the lepers.

The next thing to which Damien turned his attention was the housing question. The lepers' dwellings were deplorable. But frail as were the huts of pili grass, many of the lepers had no other shelter than what could be obtained under the branches of the castor-oil tree. Frequently after heavy rains the mats on which they lay gave out a very unpleasant vapour. Apart from the discomfort of such unprotected dwellings these conditions added considerably to the pain of the disease, the leper being peculiarly susceptible to the cold and damp weather.

A second petition to remedy this evil was accordingly despatched to headquarters, with the request that timber or other building materials should be supplied to the unfortunate people.

It was just before this, in 1874, that a *Cona* (South) wind had blown down the greater number of leper dwellings, thereby rendering outside help all the more urgent. In response to this appeal there arrived several schooner-loads of scantling with

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which to build solid frames, and every necessitous leper was given, on application, sufficient material for a decent house. The help thus contributed by the Government was supplemented by private charity, for sometimes the lepers' own friends supplied rough boards, flooring and shingles. Those lepers who could afford it, hired other lepers to construct their dwellings, but most of the victims were unable to afford this expenditure. For such as these, Damien and his leper boys volunteered their services.

That Damien's manual labour in those first ten years must have been considerable, is evident, from the record of no less than 600 cottages, large and small, which stand as a testimony of his work. The new dwellings were neat compact structures, each cottage being raised on tressels to ensure the sick from contact with the damp ground.

The immediate result of these and other sanitary improvements was a marked decrease in the death-rate, besides a lessening in the sufferings of the patients. Having now secured for the lazaretto a good water supply and more healthy surroundings,

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Damien proceeded to advocate the need for reform as regards food and clothing.

So far the dwellers in Molokai had fared badly in the matter of provisions. There had been a time indeed when the rations were even worse than when Damien came, but, in spite of some improvement, the sick people were still sadly underfed.

In consequence of Damien's representations, a Government Commission was appointed to visit the island and to inquire into the matter, and in 1881 the Princess Regent\* and her daughter, desirous of showing their interest, in person visited the lepers, after which many improvements followed. But the scantiness of the original supplies may be gathered from the fact that even so late as 1886 Damien was still petitioning the authorities for an increase of food. It is interesting, however, to notice that whereas before, he appealed for the common necessities of life, now he pleaded for small

\* It was after this visit and in recognition of his services to the leper colony, that Damien received the decoration of Knight Commander of the Order of Kalakana.



Father Damien at work with his leper boys.



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luxuries such as fresh milk, "not one-tenth of the lepers outside the hospital having tasted milk for years."

The question of clothing next occupied the mind of the reformer. In the years preceding his coming, every leper received a Government grant of so many garments per annum. This arrangement was open to various objections, which moved Damien to ask that the Government should vote a money grant of six dollars a year to every person in the lazaretto.

By this means the lepers were enabled to make their own purchases at the local clothes' stores which Damien set up in each of the leper villages of Kalawao and Kalau-papa, one village being at the foot of the cliffs, the other at the end of the promontory.

Apart from these much-needed improvements, there still remained a work which cried loudly for his consideration. This was the hospital. Any place more dreary and nerve-destroying would be difficult to imagine. It was just an empty shell : a building composed of four walls and a roof. It had

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neither beds, nor any conveniences for the sick ; and in the absence of doctors and nurses, it would require some effort of the imagination to regard it as a place of healing. Certain it is that the lepers themselves were under no illusions on the subject, for the same cart which conveyed the victim to this awful place of torture, carried his rough coffin alongside him.\*

Some of the accounts given of the sufferings endured within these walls baffle description, or, rather, the mind turns away in loathing from the description. And it was these sights of needless pain and misery, which most of all moved Damien's pity. He felt that something must be done to remove the reproach, and some effort made to alleviate the sufferings of those whose fate it was to lie there. In his determination to achieve this end, Damien allowed himself neither rest nor leisure. In season and out of season, he advocated the cause of the dying, and so strenuous and unceasing were his efforts that a resident doctor was at last

\* See "Life and Letters of Father Damien," Catholic Truth Society, London.

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appointed, and a public dispensary installed, where the lepers might obtain all that medical science could provide for the mitigation of their pain.

Hitherto the authorities at Honolulu had seemingly taken but little active interest in the welfare of the leper colony, but this public inertness arose not from want of goodwill, but rather from lack of public funds, and from the absence of any leader in Molokai who could press the claims of the lepers, and see to the proper distribution of the funds had any been forthcoming.

But when Damien came, and after he had shown himself worthy of trust, the Hawaiian Government proved their willingness to co-operate by furnishing means to carry out those reforms which he so ably championed.

As an epitome of his work, and as showing the progress, social and moral, which followed in the wake of his coming, it may not be inopportune to give the official report,\* which he furnished in after years to the Government authorities.

\* See Edward Clifford, *The Nineteenth Century*, June 1889.

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“By Special Providence of Our Divine Lord, who during His public life, showed a particular sympathy for the lepers, my way was traced towards Kalawao in May 1873. I was then thirty-three years of age, enjoying a robust good health.

“About eighty of the lepers were in hospital ; the others, with a very few Kokuas (helpers) had taken their abode further up the valley. They had cut down the old pandanus or punhala groves to build their houses, though a great many had nothing but branches of castor-oil trees with which to construct their small shelters. These frail frames were covered with ki-leaves or with sugar cane leaves, the best ones with pili grass. I myself was sheltered during several weeks under the single pandanus tree which is preserved up to the present in the church-yard. Under such primitive roofs were living pell-mell, without distinction of age or sex, old or new cases, all more or less strangers to one another, those unfortunate outcasts of society. They passed their time in playing cards, *hula* (native dances), drinking fermented ki-root beer, home-made

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alcohol, and in the sequels of all this. Their clothes were far from being clean or decent, on account of the scarcity of water which had to be brought at that time from a great distance. Many a time, in fulfilling my priestly duty at their domiciles, I have been compelled to run outside to breathe fresh air. To counteract the bad smell I made myself accustomed to the use of tobacco, whereupon the smell of the pipe preserved me somewhat from carrying in my clothes the noxious odour of the lepers. At that time the progress of the disease was fearful, and the rate of mortality very high. The miserable condition of the settlement gave it the name of a living churchyard, which name I am happy to state is no longer applicable to our place. . . .

“As there were so many dying, my priestly duty towards them often gave me the opportunity to visit them at their domiciles, and although my exhortations were addressed to the prostrated, often they would fall upon the ears of public sinners who little by little became conscious of their wicked lives and began to reform, and thus with the hope of

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a merciful Saviour, gave up their bad habits. Kindness to all, charity to the needy, a sympathising hand to the sufferers and the dying, in conjunction with a solid religious instruction to my listeners, these have been my constant means to introduce moral habits among the lepers. I am happy to say that, assisted by the local administration, my labours here, which seemed to be almost in vain at the beginning, have, thanks to a kind Providence, been greatly crowned with success."

## CHAPTER VIII

### DAILY LIFE IN THE LAZARETTO

**I**N spite of the manifold improvements set down in the last chapter, it will readily be believed that Damien's work in the leper colony could never be anything but painful.

Robert Louis Stevenson, who visited Molokai only after Damien's death, when the reforms for which Damien had given his life were firmly established, says of his experience there : "Life in the lazaretto is an ordeal from which the nerves of a man's spirit shrink, even as his eye quails under the brightness of the sun. . . . It is not the fear of possible infection. That seems a little thing when compared with the pain, the pity, and the disgust of the visitor's surroundings, and the atmosphere of affliction, disease, and physical disgrace in which he breathes. I am not a man more than

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usually timid, but I never recall the days and nights I spent on that island promontory (eight days and seven nights) without heartfelt thanks that I am somewhere else.” \*

Leprosy, indeed, may be compared to no other disease. Throughout the ages it was always considered the greatest evil which could befall a human being, though, as before mentioned, the old-time scourge was, with some exceptions, far less virulent than that which exists to-day. The present forms of leprosy may, roughly speaking, be divided into two classes : the anæsthetic or nervous, and the tubercular or nodular, though frequently both forms are present in the same patient. Among the Jews the face was rarely attacked, the disfigurement being confined to the limbs. To-day the face is the chief seat of the disease, the features assuming a leonine aspect, loathsome and hideous, the skin becoming thick, rugose, and livid, the eyes fierce, and the hair generally falling off from all parts affected. Even the throat is attacked, the voice shar-

\* Open Letter of R. L. Stevenson.

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ing the affection and sinking to a hoarse, husky whisper.\*

In an account written from the lazaretto shortly after his arrival, Damien gives some vivid details not only of the disease, but incidentally, of his manner of life at Molokai. The extract is taken from a letter addressed to his brother Pamphile, in the year 1873.

“As far as is known,” he writes, “leprosy is incurable : it seems to begin by a corruption of the blood. Discoloured patches appear on the skin, especially on the cheeks ; and the parts affected lose their feeling. After a time this discoloration covers the whole body ; then ulcers begin to form, chiefly at the extremities. The flesh is eaten away and gives out a foetid odour ; even the breath of the leper becomes so foul that the air around is poisoned with it. I have had great difficulty in getting accustomed to such an atmosphere. One day, at the Sunday Mass, I found myself so stifled that I thought I must leave the altar to breathe a little of the outer air, but I restrained myself, thinking of Our Lord when He commanded them

° See “Smith’s Dictionary of the Bible.”

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to open the grave of Lazarus, notwithstanding Martha's words, *jam fætet*. Now my sense of smell does not cause me so much inconvenience, and I enter the huts of the lepers without difficulty. Sometimes, indeed, I still feel some repugnance when I have to hear the confessions of those near their end. Often also, I scarcely know how to administer Extreme Unction when both hands and feet are nothing but raw wounds. . . . ”

From the glimpses given in the preceding pages of the awful havoc made by the disease, it is difficult, from the human standpoint, to think of Molokai, except as an abode of terror and a place of torture. *Molokai ahina*—the grey, the bleak, the rock-strewn waste clutched round in the pitiless grasp of the sea—where the sun's rays are shut out by the shadows, and where the sinister figure of Death ever grapples with one yet more terrible. Surely in such a place as this, the spirit of hope would be like to droop, if not to die? Humanly speaking, that is so. As far as the eye can see there is small room for hope in Molokai. How eloquent, then, is the testimony to the vivifying power of their

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new-found faith, and the changed conditions of the lazaretto, that the lepers should have learnt that joy may co-exist with sorrow : and that their innate cheerfulness of mind should finally re-assert itself, strengthened and purified, in the very place formerly given over to brutality and vice. It marks the resurrection of the human soul, which, once under the dominion of sin, but now raised to a sense of its individual dignity, decries from the hill-tops, the unexpected beauty of the new-born day.

And this joy of living is not confined to the spiritual side only, but is translated from the immaterial to the material.

In spite of their physical condition, the lepers were now able to face life bravely. Edward Clifford, who, as will be remembered, visited Molokai shortly before Damien's death, bears testimony to the cheerfulness which prevailed in the lazaretto : "the faces one sees are nearly always happy faces. One sees the people sitting chatting at their cottage doors, or galloping on their little ponies between the two villages [*i.e.*, Kalawao and Kalaupapa]; and one always

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receives the ready greeting and the readier smile."

That Damien lived for and among his people was one of the secrets of his success. His life belonged to them. He kept back nothing of himself. Hear what he says of the lazaretto and of the daily duties which fall to his share :

"Picture to yourself," he writes in one of his letters, "a collection of huts with eight hundred lepers. No doctor: in fact, as there is no cure, there seems no place for a doctor's skill. A white man who is a leper, and your humble servant, do all the doctoring work.

"Every morning, then, after my Mass, which is always followed by an instruction, I go to visit the sick, half of whom are Catholics. On entering each hut, I begin by offering to hear their confession. Those who refuse this spiritual help are not, therefore, refused temporal assistance, which is given to all without distinction. Consequently every one, with the exception of a very few bigoted heretics, look on me as a father. As for me, I make myself a leper

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among the lepers, to gain all to Jesus Christ. That is why in preaching I say: We lepers, not *My brethren*, as in Europe. You may judge by the following fact what a power the missioner has. Last Saturday, some of the younger people, discontented with their lot, and thinking themselves ill-treated by the Government, determined on an attempt at revolt. All, except two, were Calvinists or Mormons. Well, I had only to present myself and say a word or two, and all the heads were bowed and all was over!

“I have baptized more than two hundred persons since my arrival. A good part of these have died, with the white robe of baptismal grace. I have buried also a large number. The average of deaths is about one every day. Many are so destitute that there is nothing to defray their burial expenses. They are simply wrapped in a blanket. As far as my duties allow me time, I make coffins myself for these people.\*

“I have just built another chapel two miles from this, at the other end of our

\* It has been estimated that Damien made, in Molokai, 1000 coffins with his own hands.

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settlement. This chapel cost me 1500 francs, without counting my work as a carpenter : and I am only twenty-five francs in debt. St. Joseph is my Procurator. Our Sisters of Honolulu send me clothes, and some charitable souls do the rest.

“A few months back, the Minister of the Interior (Home Secretary) forbade me to set foot outside the leper settlement. I was then a State prisoner. To-day a despatch of the French Consul announces my liberty. Blessed be God ! I can now not only take care of my lepers, but labour also for the conversion of the rest of the island, in which there is not yet any priest. I ought to have a companion, but where can I get one ? Pray and get prayers that the Lord may bless my mission . . .”

It was during this time of isolation that Damien experienced his greatest trial, for the prohibition which prevented him from visiting the other islands prevented him from receiving those spiritual helps upon which he had placed his trust. His urgent application for permission to communicate personally with his Bishop having been



Father Damien makes his confession.



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peremptorily refused, his Bishop determined to visit Damien. It was while journeying among the other islands that Monseigneur Maigret requested to be put ashore at Molokai. But the captain of the vessel refused, the Government having forbidden all communication with the lazaretto.

There was no alternative, therefore, but for Damien to approach the trader. Putting out in a small boat rowed by some of his lepers, he came within speaking range of his ecclesiastical superior, when, standing up in his frail craft with a stretch of sea between, he made his confession aloud, and thus publicly received sacramental absolution.

Surely, such a confession as this must be unique even in missionary annals! Nor can one but think that the humility which prompted this self-abasement—for the confession had perforce to be made in the hearing of the other passengers who crowded the deck—brought down a blessing in full measure.

Considering the nature of the work in the lazaretto, and the loathing with which the natural man must have approached it, it is

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impossible to withhold our admiration for what Damien accomplished in Molokai. In his own account of his labours, what strikes us most is the simplicity with which he sets down facts, in themselves nothing short of heroic. It is this absence of pose, this utter lack of self-consciousness, which constitute not the least charm of the apostle of the lepers, who, far from considering himself entitled to human praise, was haunted only by the fear that through weakness he might yet betray his trust. Thus, in all his letters to his friends, he never ceases to ask for prayers that heaven may grant him the grace of final perseverance, without which his life's work would have been in vain.

Writing in December 1874 to his home at Tremeloo, he gives further details of his daily life in the settlement; and for fear that his mother may be anxious on his account he hastens to re-assure her that he is safe, and that even in Molokai he does not lack bodily comfort.

“. . . A few words now about my way of living. I live all alone in a little hut :\*

\* The exact dimensions were sixteen feet by ten.

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lepers never enter it. In the morning, after Mass, a woman, who is not a leper, comes to prepare my meal. My dinner consists of rice, meat, coffee, and a few biscuits. For supper, I take what was left at dinner, with a cup of tea, the water for which I boil over a lamp. My poultry-yard furnishes me with eggs. I only make two meals a day, morning and evening. I rarely take anything between. You see I live very well ; I don't starve. I am not much at home in the day-time. After dark I say my breviary by the light of my lamp, I study a bit, or write a letter. So don't wonder at getting only one letter a year from me. I really have not the time even to think of you, except in my prayers. I have been obliged to steal an hour or two from my sleep now, in order to write this letter and some others I must send to Europe.

“The New Year is at hand : I wish you all a very happy one. Don't forget me in your daily prayers.

“JOSEPH DAMIEN DE VEUSTER.”\*

\* “Life and Letters of Father Damien,” Catholic Truth Society, London.

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His life was obviously a busy one. Yet even his scanty recreation was utilised for the general good. Among his few hobbies were gardening and poultry-keeping. His fowls were particularly dear to him. He and they were like a happy family together. At his approach they would run towards him, clucking loudly and flapping their wings. So much were his feathered friends at home that they would feed from his hand, or perch on his shoulders and outstretched arms. Yet though he loved them so dearly, Damien never hesitated to sacrifice them to provide food for the sick or an occasional guest. He himself, however, was content with less delicate fare, for, like the lepers, he drew his household supplies from the Government doles shipped at intervals to the lazaretto.

At the end of two years, a second priest, Father Burgomann, was sent to take over the care of a part of the island, Damien being still left in charge of the lazaretto. This arrangement was very gratifying to Damien, for it not only ensured to him those spiritual benefits he so earnestly

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desired, but left him free to devote his whole attention to the welfare of the lepers.

So the years passed, and while he strove daily to instil into the lives of his people that regard for social and moral order, which before his coming had been so little understood, he managed at the same time to infuse into their hearts something of the natural gaiety which was peculiarly his own. And now he began to see the fruit of his earlier labours, which at the time seemed barren of result. This, indeed, must have been a great consolation in the midst of his heavy toil.

But the picture of leper-life would be incomplete if it did not do more than suggest the inspiration provoked by Damien's reforms. Religion was the real motive power which touched the hidden springs, and the all pervading atmosphere of the Unseen, the true stay and support of the lazaretto.

"My lepers," he writes, "are very fervent. They fill the Churches from morning till night, and pour forth their prayers to God with an ardour that would make some religious blush."

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One great obstacle in the work for souls was the Mormons, whose influence proved a stumbling-block to many. Yet in spite of this and other difficulties, the uplifting of the leper colony was slowly but surely accomplished. It seemed as if this simple peasant held the key to the lepers' hearts. He entered into their life. He sympathised with their difficulties; he realised their struggles; he grieved with them in their failures. Whatever came, he stood by them, —their brother and their friend.

“ You suffer,” he would say to them, “ take heart. For here in your midst is One who can turn your sorrow into joy. Go to Him then, who dwells in the Tabernacle. Go to Him, and He will console you.”\*

The answer to his appeal was as ready as it was lasting. For the first time they realised the efficacy of such human appeals: and the result of this daily recourse to a personal Saviour ever present in their midst, was a whole-hearted surrender on the part of these poor stricken folk who had hitherto

\* “Vie du Père Damien,” par R. P. Tauvel.

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been without faith or hope. For now they felt what Carlyle has so well expressed that "sorrow has not been given us for sorrow's sake, but always as a lesson from which we are to learn somewhat, which once learned, it ceases to be sorrow."

Little by little the lepers saw and understood what the poet meant, when speaking of the Divine dealings with humanity :

All that which I took from thee, I did but take,  
Not for thy harms,  
But just that thou might'st seek it in My arms.  
All which thy child's mistake  
Fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home :  
Rise, clasp My hand, and come.

Morning and evening the churches were filled with worshippers, and on Sunday mornings a stream of lepers approached the Communion rails. Nor was this all. In their new-found fervour the lepers asked to serve. It was as if the spirit of generosity shown by their Apostle were quickening the hearts of his people. They sought to make some return for the benefits received ; they begged leave to show in some tangible way their love and gratitude for the presence of

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Him who was ever the leper's Friend. And thus was established in Molokai a chain of praise and petition offered up by the lepers in expiation of their own sins and the sins of the world. Founded in the year 1879, this guild of Perpetual Adoration continues to-day with unabated fervour.

In other ways, too, the Molokii showed their re-awakened faith. To read of the processions of the Blessed Sacrament through the lazaretto, is to be carried back to the early ages of faith, before the blight of human respect and self-consciousness came down upon the world and covered up what was best in human hearts.

In Molokai the public processions are part of the lepers' life; and it is a sight which once seen is not easily forgotten. A long stream of stricken folk line the way. Those who can walk form themselves into a guard of honour, while the leper children scatter flowers along the grey route. Then comes the canopy upheld by the hand of the afflicted, under which is borne aloft the Lord of the World, Who comes to heal and to save. Close in His wake follow a multitude of

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human deformities dragging their mutilated bodies in the dust over the crushed flowers and the sweet-smelling petals, each soul intent upon participating in that great public act of praise and adoration. Indeed, the scene is such as to recall that first triumphal procession away back in the centuries, when the Chosen People cut down the green boughs and spread their garments in the way, acclaiming with glad voice the Desired of the nations.

Another and a final instance of the changed tone of the lazaretto, during the latter years of Damien's ministry, was the increased reverence shown to the dead. It marked the renewal of hope. For whereas, in former times, the body of the leper was accounted a vile thing, now it was treated as the habitation of an immortal spirit, the dwelling-place of a human soul whose redemption had been bought at a great price. Damien worked hard to produce this change. The "holy spirit of man" was to him an ever-present truth, nor could he forget the exalted destiny of even the least among men. For of these, as of the greatest,

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is it not written in lines of beauty and suggestiveness, how :

    . . . the high gods took in hand  
        Fire, and the falling of tears,  
    And a measure of sliding sand  
        From under the feet of the years;  
    And froth and drift of the sea;  
        And dust of the labouring earth;  
    And bodies of things to be  
        In the houses of death and of birth;  
    And wrought with weeping and laughter,  
        And fashioned with loathing and love,  
    With life before and after  
        And death beneath and above,  
    For a day and a night and a morrow,  
        That his strength might endure for a span  
    With travail and heavy sorrow,  
        The holy spirit of man.

Hitherto no one remembered the souls of the dead. Now the lepers had learnt what is meant by the Communion of Saints ; realised the subtle bond which unites both the living and the dead, holding as in a wide-spreading net the souls of all those who have followed the Crucified.

So the death-day of the lepers became a day of gladness. Every funeral bell sounded a joyful release, and the survivors met

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together to do honour to the dead. As the procession passed through the lazaretto to the chanting of the Miserere, sorrow seemed to have passed away, for each face was illumined with a light which came from beyond. It was a signal triumph of faith over materialism, and a striking illustration of that which is written in The Book : "Going they went and wept, casting their seeds ; but coming they shall come with joy, carrying their sheaves."

Writing from Kalawao about this time, Damien states that his health keeps good, and his work remains unchanged. "I nurse the sick, I instruct them, give them the Sacraments, and bury the dead. As fast as the sick die others are sent here, so there are always from seven hundred to eight hundred of them. Last year I built a presbytery two stories high. If any of my friends were to come to visit me, I should lodge them in the top story. I am not obliged to trouble myself much about provisions, for the Government is very good to me. I receive my weekly portion as well as the sick, and other necessaries are sent me from the

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mission. Lately another priest came here to help me (Father André Nolander); he understands medicine.

"In the course of last year, we administered baptism to one hundred and ten converts of whom several have already gone to heaven. I very seldom leave this place, so I have no news to tell you. . . ."<sup>\*</sup>

But however scanty the outside news might be, the following letter to his brother a year afterwards contains much that is interesting concerning his life in the lazaretto.

"KALAWAO, MOLOKAI

"January 31, 1880.

"MY DEAR BROTHER,—Your kind letter of the 12th November from Louvain reached me on the 2nd January. I have now been nearly seven years among the lepers. During that long period I have had opportunities of closely observing, and as it were touching with my hand, human misery under its most terrible aspect. . . .

"The Hawaiian Government still continue

\* "Le Père Damien de Veuster": Alfred Cattier, Tours.

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to collect and send us fresh lepers as they come across them, and as far as their means allow. The sixty-nine thousand piastres appropriated to the maintenance of the lepers for two years, are not sufficient to defray the cost of getting together all that are to be found in the different islands. The number of lepers exiled to Molokai is kept up between seven and eight hundred. More cannot be taken for want of means.

“Since I have been here, I have buried one hundred and ninety to two hundred every year, and still the number of living lepers is always over seven hundred. Last year, death carried off an unusually large number of Christians. There are many empty places in the Church, but in the cemetery there is hardly room left to dig the graves. I was quite vexed the other day to find they had begun to dig a grave just by the large cross, in the very spot which I had so long reserved for myself! I had to insist on the place being left vacant. The cemetery, Church, and presbytery form one enclosure, thus at night-time I am sole keeper of this garden of the dead, where my spiritual children lie at rest.

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"My greatest pleasure is to go there to say my beads and meditate on that unending happiness which so many of them are already enjoying. There, too, my thoughts dwell on the sufferings of Purgatory. I confess to you, my dear brother, the cemetery and the hospital, where the dying lie, are my best meditation books, as well for the benefit of my own soul, as in view of preparing my instructions.

"I preach every morning after Mass, and on Sundays at High Mass my children sing beautifully, almost like finished musicians. But recently, in consequence of death and of chest diseases, I have lost all the best voices in my choir. I shall have great difficulty in getting it up again. For some years I have had a little orphanage for leper children, to whom a good widow, not a leper herself, somewhat elderly, acts as matron. Though the houses are at some distance from one another, the lepers have meals in common. Each receives seven pounds of beef every week and twenty-one pounds of a vegetable which we call *taro*, which we consider very nourishing. Besides

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this, we have planted a large field of sweet potatoes which we keep in reserve, in case the ordinary provisions should not reach us in time.

"In the lepers' quarters is a large shop where clothes and other things may be bought by those who are fortunate enough to have money. From time to time I receive large bundles of clothes for the poor and for my numerous children. It is owing to the exertions of the kind Superioress of our Sisters at Honolulu that I am assisted by public charity. During the first years of my ministry here, I often received considerable alms through our procurator in Paris, but not having played the part of a public beggar, the charity of our benefactors over the sea seems to have lost sight of the poor lepers of Molokai. Father André has been nineteen months in the new leper village of Kalaupapa, where the religous movement is still at work. During this time I have had to visit the rest of our island every month. We now have there one large Church and four Chapels. Two white men, who are Catholics, have sugar manufactories on the

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island, but it is not yet pervaded by a Catholic spirit.

“Returning yesterday evening after an absence of six days, I found one of my children dying. She begged me to bring her the Holy Viaticum without delay, and scarce had she finished her thanksgiving when she gave up her soul to the God whom she had just received. Yesterday I made her coffin myself and dug her grave. This morning after the Requiem Mass I was apprised of the death of two more members of my flock—so to-day I have three burials! Often I carry the Holy Viaticum publicly to the dying, as is done in Catholic countries. . . .

“We have two schools in the leper quarters, the masters of which are Catholics and paid by the Government. The majority of the leper children are Catholics.\* We meet with very little opposition on the part of the

\* The difficulty of calling the school registers in Molokai must necessitate a reserve force of gravity, in view of the list of names which are surely still to seek in the calendar of the saints: “Sit-in-the-Cold,” “White-bird,” “Eyes-of-Fire,” “The-first-rose,” “Fall-from-a-horse,” “Grey-wing,” “A-river-of-truth.”

## DAILY LIFE IN THE LAZARETTO

Protestants who do not trouble themselves much about lepers of their creed. It is quite different in places I visited outside the lepers' quarters. I wish I could get a good priest for them, full of zeal and patience. What are our young countrymen thinking of, that they do not come forward with generous hearts to the field of battle, and fill the gaps in our ranks which death and old age have made?

"Our Mission is well established in the Sandwich Isles, but priests are needed. Now is indeed the time to pray the Lord of the harvest to send fresh labourers. Emigrants are arriving in numbers from China, from the Portuguese Islands, from Madeira, and the islands of the South Pacific to inhabit our islands from which the aboriginal population is gradually disappearing.

"Believe me, Dear Brother,  
"Your devoted brother in the Sacred Hearts,

"J. DAMIEN DE VEUSTER,

"Missionary Priest." \*

"Life and Letters of Father Damien," Catholic Truth Society, London.

## CHAPTER IX

### DAMIEN THE LEPER

**I**N depicting the lives of the heroes of the Church it has hitherto frequently been the custom to eliminate the human element, with the object of intensifying the superhuman—the result being that the ordinary Christian has for the most part found himself out of touch with these abnormal creatures of perfection.

Nowadays other counsels prevail. Studies from life are encouraged in preference to the fancy pictures of a less critical age. The modern reader desires to see the servant of God as he was in life, or at least as he appeared to the eyes of his contemporaries. For it is the verdict of these, impartially weighed, which constitutes his abiding portrait, on the general principle that the *via media* of Truth mostly lies between the enthusiasm of a man's friends and the criticism

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of his enemies. That Damien could and did attract his fellows from a social as well as a spiritual point of view we have good reason to know. In the opinion of one who visited him in the years before he was stricken, the peasant priest is described as possessing considerable personal attractions.

Standing on the threshold of his chapel he gave a cheery welcome to this traveller, who has set down his impression as follows : " His dress was worn and faded ; his hair tumbled like a schoolboy's ; his hands stained and hardened by toil. But the glow of health was in his face, the buoyancy of youth in his manner ; while his ringing laugh, his ready sympathy, and his inspiring magnetism, told of one who in any sphere might do a noble work."

But inasmuch as no man was ever perfect save One, we may well leave a margin for the insistence of human nature, even in those who have attained to a high degree of sanctity. For by allowing this latitude to our spiritual leaders, we incidentally offer to mankind an inducement to greater endeavour, since it is only in their human

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weaknesses that the rank and file can claim any kinship with the saints.

For as Robert Browning says :

Man is not God but hath God's end to serve,  
A master to obey, a course to take,  
Somewhat to cast off, somewhat to become ?  
Grant this, then man must pass from old to new,  
From vain to real, from mistake to fact.  
From what once seemed good, to what now  
proves best.

Damien, therefore, was not perfect ; but it is for this very reason, and in the light of his limitations that he becomes of interest to us, who tread the lower paths.

Damien's faults, such as they were, establish between us and him a bond of brotherhood, which proclaims him to be in very truth, of the same human stuff as ourselves.

His undoubted heroism both in the order of nature and of grace, did not prevent his human defects from peering out from beneath the wrappings of the divine. Yet in spite of his natural imperfections, Damien won all along the line, rising to such heights of self-abnegation and charity as have gained

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him an honoured place among the world's great men.

He had his failings like the rest of mankind. For though he was a man of exceptional courage and bravery ; though he gave in his own person an example of heroic virtue and self-sacrifice ; though his wonderful versatility enabled him to combine the duties of priest, doctor, magistrate, schoolmaster, surveyor, architect, builder, mason, carpenter and gravedigger—in spite of all these gifts, Damien was not popular with his fellow officials at Molokai.

The lofty idealism that always dominated his schemes of social reform, and the strength of will which enabled him to impose upon the leper colony a standard of ethics higher than that of the majority of his fellow workers postulated a type of man calculated to grate upon the susceptibilities of less noble minds. His ways were not their ways. His idiosyncrasies annoyed them. His forceful character got on their nerves.\*

\* It is only right to say here that Damien was always popular among, and indeed greatly beloved by his brother priests and co-religionists.

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And what did they say of him—these men who during the latter years of his life, shared with him the burden of local government ? “A difficult man to work with,” said one ; “a good man, but very officious,” said another ; “obstinate and headstrong,” said a third ; “brusque and overbearing,” said a fourth . . . while all alike condemned his social methods—his orphanages, said they, were ill-managed, over-crowded and ill-kept.

But it is just these very imperfections that endear Damien to us. It is in fact this subtle blending of the human and the Divine ; this daily struggle between the spirit and the flesh ; this ever-recurring subjugation of nature to grace, that raises humanity to a vision of the All Perfect. Such, as Newman says, are the means which God has provided “for the creation of the Saint out of the sinner : He takes him as he is and uses him against himself. . . . Not as if He used him as a mere irrational creature, who is impelled by instincts and governed by external incitements without any will of his own, and to whom one pleasure is the same

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as another, the same in kind, though different in degree. I have already said, it is the very triumph of His grace that He enters into the heart of man and persuades it and prevails with it while He changes it. He violates in nothing that original constitution of mind which He gave to man: He treats him as man; He leaves him the liberty of acting this way or that; He appeals to all his powers and faculties, to his reason, to his prudence, to his moral sense, to his conscience . . . but still, on the whole, the animating principle of the new life by which it is both kindled and sustained is the flame of charity. . . .”\*

This certainly was the motive power of Damien’s every act. His life was such that it could only be lived by one who loved much: and indeed Damien’s love was a mighty, if unconscious force, in his work for souls. If he could lead back a wanderer, no sacrifice was too great for him to make. Every sinner to him was but a loved son in disguise—a prodigal, footsore and weary—

\* See “Purity and Love.” Discourses to mixed congregations.

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who, after dwelling afar off, was impelled by some primal instinct inherent in his nature, to return to his Father's house, to refresh his eyes with a sight of the homeland and renew the dim but sweet memories of his childhood.

But though many a prodigal may draw near to his home in those after years of sorrow, it is not always that a reconciliation is effected. Pride, shame, remorse—these and such-like considerations often rise up and bar his way, even when his feet press the very threshold. It is then that such a one feels the need of human help and encouragement. This is the moment which marks the turning-point in many an ill-spent life. And who, more than Damien, could discern the erring soul's silent cry? Who, more than he, could probe the depths of the human heart—who, more than he, could feel for and pity the plight of the wanderer, the utter despondency, the helplessness, the numbing despair, which, after a long course of evil, beset the mind of the sinner, when first he turns himself to his God?

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Essentially a mediator, his daily task was to translate the Divine love into human language and then to lead the penitent to the steps of the Mercy-seat ; his conception of the Infinite, finding an echo in those exquisite lines of Browning :

Would I fain, with my impotent yearning  
Do all for this man  
And dare doubt He alone shall not help him  
Who yet alone can ?

And he would plead with the sinner in that human way which is given but to few, drawing him upwards by such steps as the mind of man can best appreciate, and such as stricken souls most need. He calms their fears. He tells them of the tender love, which prompted the Son of God to become an outcast, even as they, so that He might go before them across the fields of darkness and open to them the gates of day. Always does he urge them to press forward with quickening feet. And this is the vision he promises to each of them :

O Saul, it shall be  
A Face like my face that receives thee : a Man  
like to me,

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Thou shalt love, and be loved by, for ever ; a  
Hand like this hand  
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee !  
See the Christ stand.

This power of reconciliation was Damien's peculiar and particular gift. He believed in the inherent good which slumbers in every heart, no matter how debased. His endeavour was to awaken in the individual the wonderful possibilities of life. And in his intercourse with souls he put into practice those words which surely ought to be writ large over a desponding world :

"To have faith is to create ; to have hope is to call down blessing ; to have love is to work miracles."

From a human standpoint Damien's duties in the lazaretto must have taxed very severely his powers of endurance. Indeed he is forced to admit this, even during that period of his life which preceded the end, before he himself fell a victim to the disease and was constrained to walk hand in hand with death. Yes, even as a sound man, enjoying normal health, the confession is forced from him that life in the lazaretto was an ordeal from

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which "the nerves of a man's spirit shrink." And what was the secret of his strength? How did he bear up under the trials of the charnel-house? Whence did he procure that inexhaustible fund of joy and gladness? Listen. Here are his own words.

"Without the Blessed Sacrament a position like mine would be intolerable. But having Our Lord with me, I am always gay, and work cheerfully for the relief of the unfortunate lepers."

But great as his trials and sufferings had already been, Damien was to be still further proved in the crucible of pain. For eleven years he had gone about among the stricken people of the lazaretto, tending their bodies made foul by disease, whispering words of hope into dying ears, and, when life was extinct, fashioning with his own hand the coffin destined to hold the poor clay, and then tenderly laying each to rest in the quickly-filling churchyard. The performance of these duties brought him into such close and continual relations with the lepers that there could be but one result: his infection was a foregone conclusion. But

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Damien knew no fear, or rather his was the love that casteth out fear. To him :

Love was the startling thing, the new :  
Love was the all-sufficient too . . . .

He gave no thought to himself ; he thought only of Him Who had pity on the multitude, of Him Who had willed that love of the brotherhood should be the standard and measure of man's love for the Divinity.

Away back in the years, when Socrates stood in the presence of unmerited death, his contemporaries waited eagerly to see how far his philosophy would serve him ; for the wisdom which answers in life is oftentimes found wanting in death. But as we know, Socrates remained firm : his hope lay beyond the grave.

“Anytus and Meletus can kill me,” said he, “but they cannot hurt me.” It was this answer which challenged the admiration of his critics, while it strengthened the faith of his friends. Thus did the pagan seeker put the seal upon a well-spent life, going out into the Unknown with a mind attuned to the ruling of his judges, even while he denied the justice of their decree.

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In view of resignation such as this on the part of an unbeliever, it is but natural to expect even greater fortitude in one upborne by the Christian hope. Nor are we disappointed in the hero of Molokai. Like Socrates, he accepts his fate bravely; but with a finer perception than was granted to the philosopher, Damien goes so far as to rejoice that he should have been chosen to participate in that mystery of suffering without which there had been no redemption. Therefore, instead of recoiling from the prospect of a lingering and terrible death, in comparison with which Socrates' fate was as nothing—for the drinking of the hemlock ensured a quick passing from life to death, whereas the cup of which Damien drank, doomed him to a long drawn-out consciousness—death striking him piecemeal, limb by limb—nevertheless, Damien went out to meet his fate cheerfully, giving it welcome as a cherished messenger of The Crucified.

Speaking in the year 1884 when he first was stricken and before he had grown familiar with the horror of the disease, he yet could say: “I am glad there is now no

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doubt about my sickness, I am a leper." But though he had now joined the ranks of the afflicted it is strange to find him again alone, the assistant priest having previously been transferred, and no successor appointed. But stricken as he was, and suffering all the tortures inseparable from leprosy in its first stages, Damien relaxed not his energies nor permitted himself any concessions ; neither did he devote any extra care to himself during those five years which remained to him.

He rarely referred to his condition, but in writing to his Bishop, to whom he was obliged to make the declaration, he put it thus simply : "I cannot come to Honolulu, for leprosy has attacked me. There are signs of it on my left cheek and ear, and my eyebrows are beginning to fall ; I shall soon be quite disfigured. As I have no doubt of the real character of the malady I remain calm, resigned and very happy in the midst of my people. The good God knows what is best for my sanctification, and I say daily, *Fiat voluntas tua*, with a ready heart."

For awhile the disease seemed to yield to

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treatment (the Japanese treatment): a respite which Damien utilised for the public good. "The Hawaiian Government," he writes, "have commissioned me to build here a large hospital for seven hundred lepers to be treated entirely under my direction. So I have to work, not only as priest, but as doctor and architect."\*

But the amelioration which at first gave rise to hope was not maintained. Slowly but surely the disease gained ground, leaving no doubt as to the ultimate issue. His end was now approaching, but before he closed his eyes on the lazaretto he had the consolation of seeing that accomplished for which he had laboured. His work was done: the cause for which he had given his life had been espoused by others. The welfare of Molokai was assured. At the termination of his sixteen years' apostolate there were no less than five churches and two resident priests in the island. There was also the zealous

\* It was during these strenuous months before any clerical assistance had been sent to his aid, that Mr. Dutton, an American convert, volunteered as medical "dresser" to the lazaretto, thus setting the chaplain free for his other and more pressing duties.

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lay assistant who had devoted himself to the care of the sick, and finally, as the crowning of Damien's hope and endeavour, the work of the lazaretto had been taken up by a band of Franciscan Sisters, whose work in the orphanages and the hospital was destined to perfect that which Damien had begun. "If we only had the Sisters!" had been his cry for many a day. And now, after patient waiting and constant prayer, the Sisters had arrived. It was his *Nunc dimittis*. After sixteen years of loathsome toil, during which he suffered all the horrors of a living death, his release was at hand.

. . . . .

The room wherein he lies is open to the sunshine. Over the presbytery door the honeysuckle is clasping hands above the entrance, its perfume being wafted in by the soft air, to the stricken man. His temporal affairs have been set in order, his soul is prepared for the last journey, and patiently he awaits the summons.

During that day he called his fellow



Awaiting the last summons.



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missionary to him. "Look at my hands," he said, "all the wounds are healing and the crust is becoming black—that is a sign of death, as you know very well. Look at my eyes, I have seen so many lepers die that I cannot be mistaken. Death is not far off. I should like to have seen the Bishop again, but the Good God is calling me to celebrate Easter with Himself. May God be blessed for it!"

The following day, when his fellow missionary who had prepared him for death begged for Damien's blessing, he asked that Damien, like Elias, might bequeath to him his mantle, whereupon the dying man answered playfully with: "*Cui bono?* it is full of leprosy!" Thus; the gaiety of heart and the simple faith, Damien's characteristics in life, remained with him to the end. On April 15, 1889, he died, his soul going out to the Master whom he had followed even unto death.

At the news a sudden hush fell on the lazaretto: a pall of sorrow seemed to cover the little island of Molokai.

Damien is dead! The leper's friend is

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no more ! Like an awe-stricken whisper the sad news came to Honolulu, and from there was flashed across the seas. In every European and American capital the street posters proclaimed it ; newspapers vied one with another in offering tribute to the dead, while a thrill of horror mingled with admiration ran through the listening world. For some time past Damien of Molokai had been regarded as a public idol ; and now the great heart was still, and this man who had done great deeds among his fellows was at last called to his reward, while his plague-stricken body was let down into a leper's grave.

In England, the news was received with a wild outburst of popular feeling. A wave of enthusiasm swept the land from end to end, and Damien became the man of the hour. In that moment the bonds of a common humanity asserted themselves ; for awhile the barriers which divide creed from creed, and class from class were broken down. Divisions, social, political and religious, were thrust aside and forgotten ; Damien was acclaimed by all as a man and

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a brother. In the searchlight of death it seemed as if each unit in the nation had been brought face to face with those words of truth : "There are not too many heroisms in the world ; the earth will not become too God-like." Therefore they mourned him as one they could ill spare, and offered up laments that his place among the living must remain for ever void.

Public meetings were convened and a national committee formed for the object of giving a tangible and lasting expression to the respect and admiration of the British nation. And as the effect of a striking speech delivered at this meeting by King Edward (then Prince of Wales) a triple resolution was unanimously passed : (1) The erection of a suitable monument at Molokai ; (2) The foundation of a Damien Institute in England, where the study of leprosy was to be made a speciality ; (3) the institution of a detailed inquiry into the state of leprosy in India and throughout the British dominions.

All these resolutions were subsequently carried out, and the large granite cross on which are inscribed the words from St.

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John : "Greater love than this hath no man, that he give his life for his friend"—stands as a lasting testimony of England's love for the Belgian peasant who suffered and died amid the shadows.

To-day the sun streams down on the little wedge-shaped island that lifts its head out of the azure sea, and the waves lap the shore in sweet cadence as though chanting an endless requiem over him whose ashes lie buried beneath.

Under the pandanus-tree he sleeps ; deep down in the yellow sand. It is the same pandanus which gave him shelter during those first months of his exile, that now keeps watch, until such time as the graves are opened, and the sea gives up its dead.

Meanwhile, we fain would bear in mind those beautiful lines which the poet has woven round his place of rest.

No golden dome shines over Damien's sleep :  
A leper's grave upon a leprous strand,  
Where hope is dead, and hand must shrink from  
hand,  
Where cataracts wail towards a moaning deep,  
And frowning purple cliffs in mercy keep

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All wholesome life at distance, hath God planned  
For him who led the saints heroic band  
And died a shepherd of Christ's exiled sheep.  
O'er Damien's dust, the broad skies bend for dome,  
Stars burn for golden letters, and the sea  
Shall roll perpetual anthem round his rest :  
For Damien made the charnel house life's home,  
Matched love with death ; and Damien's name  
    shall be  
A glorious benediction, world-possesst.

## CHAPTER X

### IN MEMORIAM

**I**N reviewing the work which Damien accomplished beneath the cliffs of Molokai, one cannot but be struck by that spirit of other-worldliness which illumined his everyday life. And as the light ever shines the brighter, by reason of the surrounding gloom, so the glory of his achievement is enhanced by its being set in an age of self-seeking, when the pursuit of the material is apt to shut out the claims of the spiritual.

Damien's success, however, in overcoming the tendencies of his age ought not to be for us a matter of surprise. It merely furnishes but another illustration of those untold possibilities which lie hidden in every heart—possibilities which are destined to remain for ever barren, unless the spirit be quickened by the infusion of divinity, which is the life of grace.

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Indifferent alike to praise or blame, this peasant priest held on his way unmoved. The opinion of men was naught to him. He strove for the highest; he worked for his God. Therefore whatever came to his hand, that he did with a singleness of purpose and a wealth of love which never failed.

To many labourers this corner of the vineyard might have seemed unusually sterile, but not to him who believed that :

Ere stars were thundergirt, or piled  
The heavens, God thought on me, his child ;  
Ordained a life for me, arrayed  
Its circumstances every one  
To the minutest:

Therefore was he satisfied to minister to the stricken of Israel. Nay, he was more than satisfied; he was happy, for was he not "doing the King's work all the dim day long?"

Indeed, his life in the lazaretto might well give the answer to the challenge flung down by Robert Browning :

Who's alive ?  
Our men scarce seem in earnest now,  
Distinguished names !—but, 'tis somehow

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As if they played at being names  
Still more distinguished, like the games of children.

Yet in spite of all that Damien did in the cause of suffering humanity ; in spite of his brave endurance of incredible ills ; in spite, too, of his known qualities of mind and the sanctity of his life—even he could not escape the malice of human tongues. The grave had hardly closed over him before a voice was raised to malign his memory. Unlike most libels, however, the foul slander worked unwittingly for his good. Had it been less vile, perchance it had passed unnoticed, but happily for posterity and particularly for us of the English-speaking race, it was taken up and refuted by a mighty pen indeed—the pen of Robert Louis Stevenson.

His famous Open Letter—than which there is perhaps no more brilliant piece of satire, nor anything more convincing in English literature—and this by reason of the magnificent strength of its testimony, no less than by the vigour of its style—was a complete vindication of Damien's work and an enduring record of his heroic virtues.

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This being so, it seems but fitting to append here the libel and its refutation, as a concluding tribute to him who toiled until the night came, wherein no man might labour more.

The accusation was in the form of a letter written by a Dr. Hyde, of Honolulu, to a Rev. Mr. Gage, of Sydney, who sent it to the *Sydney Presbyterian*, which organ disseminated the story through the medium of its columns. Some months later, Stevenson, who was then journeying in the South Seas, put into port and chanced upon the issue of the newspaper in which the libel appeared. The despicable charges roused all the chivalry of Stevenson's nature. For, if to attack the defenceless is the act of a coward, what shall be said of him who strikes at the dead ? Stevenson seized his opportunity, and never before or since has any defaulter been held up to the scorn and contempt of mankind as was the unhappy man whom Stevenson impaled on the end of his pen. The document runs as follows : \*

\* It has been thought well to omit a few lines from the text, to bring it more within the scope of the "St. Nicholas Series."

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*Father Damien.* An open letter to the Reverend Dr. Hyde, of Honolulu, from Robert Louis Stevenson, Sydney, February 25, 1890 :

“ SIR,—It may probably occur to you that we have met, and visited, and conversed ; on my side, with interest. You may remember that you have done me several courtesies, for which I was prepared to be grateful. But there are duties which come before gratitude, and offences which justly divide friends, far more acquaintances. Your letter to the Reverend H. B. Gage is a document which, in my sight, if you had filled me with bread when I was starving, if you had sat up to nurse my father when he lay a-dying, would yet absolve me from the bonds of gratitude. You know enough, doubtless, of the process of canonisation to be aware that, a hundred years after the death of Damien, there will appear a man charged with the painful office of the *devil's advocate*. After that noble brother of mine, and of all frail clay, should have lain a century at rest, one shall accuse, one defend him. The cir-

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cumstance is unusual that the devil's advocate should be a volunteer, should be a member of a sect immediately rival, and should make haste to take upon himself his ugly office ere the bones are cold ; unusual, and of a taste which I shall leave my readers free to qualify ; unusual, and to me inspiring. If I have at all learned the trade of using words to convey truth and to arouse emotion, you have at last furnished me with a subject. For it is in the interest of all mankind and the cause of public decency in every quarter of the world, not only that Damien should be righted, but that you and your letter should be displayed at length, in their true colours, to the public eye.

“To do this properly, I must begin by quoting you at large : I shall then proceed to criticise your utterance from several points of view, divine and human, in the course of which I shall attempt to draw again and with more specification the character of the dead saint whom it has pleased you to vilify : so much being done, I shall say farewell to you for ever.

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‘REV. H. B. GAGE,

‘HONOLULU,  
‘August 2, 1889.

‘DEAR BROTHER.—In answer to your inquiries about Father Damien, I can only reply that we who knew the man are surprised at the extravagant newspaper laudations, as if he was a most saintly philanthropist. The simple truth is, he was a coarse, dirty man, headstrong and bigoted. He was not sent to Molokai, but went there without orders; did not stay at the leper settlement (before he became one himself), but circulated freely over the whole island (less than half the island is devoted to the lepers), and he came often to Honolulu. He had no hand in the reforms and improvements inaugurated, which were the work of our Board of Health, as occasion required and means were provided. . . . The leprosy of which he died should be attributed to his vices and carelessness. Others have done much for the lepers, our own ministers, the government physicians, and so forth, but never with the Catholic idea of meriting eternal life.

‘Yours, &c.,  
‘C. M. HYDE.’

(From the *Sydney Presbyterian*, October 26, 1889)

## IN MEMORIAM

“To deal fitly with a letter so extraordinary, I must draw at the outset on my private knowledge of the signatory and his sect. It may offend others ; scarcely you, who have been so busy to collect, so bold to publish, gossip on your rivals. And this is perhaps the moment when I may best explain to you the character of what you are to read : I conceive you as a man quite beyond and below the reticences of civility : with what measure you mete, with that shall it be measured you again ; with you, at last, I rejoice to feel the button off the foil and to plunge home. And if in aught that I shall say I should offend others, your colleagues, whom I respect and remember with affection, I can but offer them my regret ; I am not free, I am inspired by the consideration of interests far more large ; and such pain as can be inflicted by anything from me must be indeed trifling when compared with the pain with which they read your letter. It is not the hangman, but the criminal, that brings dishonour on the house.

“ You belong, sir, to a sect—I believe

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my sect, and that in which my ancestors laboured—which has enjoyed, and partly failed to utilise, an exceptional advantage in the islands of Hawaii. The first missionaries came; they found the land already self-purged of its old and bloody faith; they were embraced, almost on their arrival, with enthusiasm; what troubles they supported came far more from whites than from Hawaiians; and to these last they stood (in a rough figure) in the shoes of God. This is not the place to enter into the degree or causes of their failure, such as it is. One element alone is pertinent, and must here be plainly dealt with. In the course of their evangelical calling, they—or too many of them—grew rich. It may be news to you that the houses of the missionaries are a cause of mocking on the streets of Honolulu. It will at least be news to you, that when I returned your civil visit, the driver of my cab commented on the size, the taste, and the comfort of your home. It would have been news certainly to myself, had any one told me that afternoon that I should live to drag such matter into print. But you see,

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sir, how you degrade better men to your own level ; and it is needful that those who are to judge betwixt you and me, betwixt Damien and the devil's advocate, should understand your letter to have been penned in a house which could raise, and that very justly, the envy and comments of the passers by. I think (to employ a phrase of yours which I admire) it 'should be attributed' to you that you have never visited the scene of Damien's life and death. If you had, and had recalled it, and looked about your pleasant rooms, even your pen perhaps would have been stayed.

"Your sect (and remember, as far as any sect avows me, it is mine) has not done ill in a worldly sense in the Hawaiian kingdom. When calamity befell their innocent parishioners, when leprosy descended and took root in the Eight Islands, a *quid pro quo* was to be looked for. To that prosperous mission, and to you, as one of its adornments, God had sent at last an opportunity. I know I am touching here upon a nerve acutely sensitive. I know that others of

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your colleagues look back on the inertia of your church, and the intrusive and decisive heroism of Damien, with something almost to be called remorse. I am sure it is so with yourself ; I am persuaded your letter was inspired by a certain envy not essentially ignoble, and the one human trait to be espied in that performance. You were thinking of the lost chance, the past day ; of that which should have been conceived and was not ; of services due and not rendered. *Time was*, said the voice in your ear, in your pleasant room, as you sat raging and writing ; and if the words written were base beyond parallel, the rage, I am happy to repeat—it is the only compliment I shall pay you—the rage was almost virtuous. But, sir, when we have failed, and another has succeeded ; when we have stood by, and another has stepped in ; when we sit and grow bulky in our charming mansions, and a plain, uncouth peasant steps into the battle, under the eyes of God, and succours the afflicted, and consoles the dying, and is himself afflicted in his turn, and dies upon the field of honour—the battle cannot be

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retrieved as your unhappy irritation has suggested. It is a lost battle, and lost for ever. One thing remained to you in your defeat—some rags of common honour ; and these you have made haste to cast away.

“Common honour ; not the honour of having done anything right, but the honour of not having done aught conspicuously foul ; the honour of the inert : that was what remained to you. We are not all expected to be Damiens ; a man may conceive his duty more narrowly, he may love his comforts better ; none will cast a stone at him for that. But will a gentleman of your reverend profession allow me an example from the fields of gallantry ? When two gentlemen compete for the favour of a lady, and the one succeeds and the other is rejected, and (as will sometimes happen) matter damaging to the successful rival’s credit reaches the ear of the defeated, it is held by plain men of no pretensions that his mouth is, in the circumstance, almost necessarily closed. Your church and Damien’s were in Hawaii upon a rivalry to do

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well : to help, to edify, to set divine examples. You having (in one huge instance) failed, and Damien succeeded, I marvel it should not have occurred to you that you were doomed to silence ; that when you had been outstripped in that high rivalry, and sat inglorious in the midst of your well-being, in your pleasant room — and Damien, crowned with glories and horrors, toiled and rotted in that pigsty of his under the cliff of Kalawao—you, the elect who would not, were the last man on earth to collect and propagate gossip on the volunteer who would and did.

“I think I see you—for I try to see you in the flesh as I write these sentences—I think I see you leap at the word *pigsty*, a hyperbolical expression at the best. ‘He had no hand in the reforms,’ he was ‘a coarse, dirty man’ ; these were your own words ; and you may think it possible that I am come to support you with fresh evidence. In a sense it is even so. Damien has been too much depicted with a conventional halo and conventional features ; so drawn by men who perhaps had not the eye to remark or the

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pen to express the individual; or who perhaps were only blinded and silenced by generous admiration, such as I partly envy for myself—such as you, if your soul were enlightened, would envy on your bended knees. It is the least defect of such a method of portraiture that it makes a path easy for the devil's advocate, and leaves for the misuse of the slanderer a considerable field of truth. For the truth that is suppressed by friends is the readiest weapon of the enemy. The world, in your despite, may perhaps owe you something, if your letter be the means of substituting once for all a credible likeness for a wax abstraction. For, if that world at all remember you, on the day when Damien of Molokai shall be named saint, it will be in virtue of one work: your letter to the Reverend H. B. Gage.

“You may ask on what authority I speak. It was my inclement destiny to become acquainted not with Damien, but with Dr. Hyde. When I visited the lazaretto Damien was already in his resting grave. But such information as I have, I gathered on the spot

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in conversation with those who knew him well and long: some indeed who revered his memory; but others who had sparred and wrangled with him, who beheld him with no halo, who perhaps regarded him with small respect, and through whose unprepared and scarcely partial communications the plain, human features of the man shone on me convincingly. These gave me what knowledge I possess; and I learnt it in that scene where it could be most completely and sensitively understood—Kalawao, which you have never visited, about which you have never so much as endeavoured to inform yourself: for, brief as your letter is, you have found the means to stumble into that confession. '*Less than one-half of the island*,' you say, '*is devoted to the lepers*.' Molokai—'*Molokai ahina*,' the 'grey,' lofty, and most desolate island—along all its northern side plunges a front of precipice into a sea of unusual profundity. This range of cliff is, from east to west, the true end and frontier of the island. Only in one spot there projects into the ocean a certain triangular and rugged down, grassy, stony,

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windy, and rising in the midst into a hill with a dead crater : the whole bearing to the cliff that overhangs it somewhat the same relation as a bracket to a wall. With this hint you will now be able to pick out the leper station on a map ; you will be able to judge how much of Molokai is thus cut off between the surf and precipice, whether less than a half, or less than a quarter, or a fifth, or a tenth—or, say, a twentieth ; and the next time you burst into print you will be in a position to share with us the issue of your calculations.

“ I imagine you to be one of those persons who talk with cheerfulness of that place which oxen and wainropes could not drag you to behold. You, who do not even know its situation on the map, probably denounce sensational descriptions, stretching your limbs the while in your pleasant parlour on Beretania Street. When I was pulled ashore there one early morning, there sat with me in the boat two Sisters, bidding farewell (in humble imitation of Damien) to the lights and joys of human life. One of these wept silently ; I could not withhold myself from

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joining her. Had you been there it is my belief that nature would have triumphed even in you; and as the boat drew but a little nearer, and you beheld the stairs crowded with abominable deformations of our common manhood, and saw yourself landing in the midst of such a population as only now and then surrounds us in the horror of a nightmare—what a haggard eye you would have rolled over your reluctant shoulder towards the house on Beretania Street! Had you gone on; had you found every fourth face a blot upon the landscape; had you visited the hospital and seen the butt-ends of human beings lying there almost unrecognisable, but still breathing, still thinking, still remembering; you would have understood that life in the lazaretto is an ordeal from which the nerves of a man's spirit shrink, even as his eye quails under the brightness of the sun; you would have felt it was (even to-day) a pitiful place to visit and a hell to dwell in. It is not the fear of possible infection. That seems a little thing when compared with the pain, the pity, and the disgust of the visitor's surroundings, and the

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atmosphere of affliction, disease and physical disgrace in which he breathes. I do not think I am a man more than usually timid ; but I never recall the days and nights I spent upon that island promontory (eight days and seven nights) without heartfelt thankfulness that I am somewhere else. I find in my diary that I speak of my stay as a 'grinding experience' : I have once jotted in the margin, '*Harrowing* is the word' ; and when the *Molokii* bore me at last towards the outer world I kept repeating to myself, with a new conception of their pregnancy, those simple words of the song :

,Tis the most distressful country that ever yet was seen.

And observe : that which I saw and suffered from was a settlement purged, bettered, beautified ; the new village built, the hospital and the Bishop-Home excellently arranged ; the sisters, the doctor, and the missionaries, all indefatigable in their noble tasks. It was a different place when Damien came there and made his great renunciation, and slept

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that first night under a tree amidst his rotting brethren : alone with pestilence ; and looking forward (with what courage, with what pitiful sinkings of dread, God only knows) to a lifetime of dressing sores and stumps.

You will say, perhaps, I am too sensitive, that sights as painful abound in cancer hospitals and are confronted daily by doctors and nurses. I have long learned to admire and envy the doctors and the nurses. But there is no cancer hospital so large and populous as Kalawao and Kalaupapa ; and in such matter every fresh case, like every inch of length in the pipe of an organ, deepens the note of the impression ; for what daunts the onlooker is that monstrous sum of human suffering by which he stands surrounded. Lastly, no doctor or nurse is called upon to enter once for all the doors of that Gehenna ; they do not say farewell, they need not abandon hope, on its sad threshold ; they but go for a time to their high calling, and can look forward as they go, to relief, to recreation, and to rest. But Damien shut to with his own hand the doors of his own sepulchre.

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“I shall now extract three passages from my diary at Kalawao.

“A. ‘Damien is dead and already somewhat ungratefully remembered in the field of his labours and sufferings. “He was a good man, but very officious,” says one. Another tells me he had fallen (as other priests so easily do) into something of the ways and habits of thought of a Kanaka ; but he had the wit to recognise the fact, and the good sense to laugh at (over) it. A plain man it seems he was ; I cannot find he was a popular.’

“B. ‘After Ragsdale’s death (Ragsdale was a famous Luna, or overseer, of the unruly settlement) there followed a brief term of office by Father Damien, which served only to publish the weakness of that noble man. He was rough in his ways, and he had no control. Authority was relaxed ; Damien’s life was threatened, and he was soon eager to resign.’

“C. ‘Of Damien I begin to have an idea. He seems to have been a man of the peasant class, certainly of the peasant type : shrewd ;

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ignorant and bigoted, yet with an open mind, and capable of receiving and digesting a reproof if it were bluntly administered; superbly generous in the least thing as well as in the greatest, and as ready to give his last shirt (although not without human grumbling) as he had been to sacrifice his life; essentially indiscreet and officious, which made him a troublesome colleague; domineering in all his ways, which made him incurably unpopular with the Kanakas, but yet destitute of real authority, so that his boys laughed at him and he must carry out his wishes by the means of bribes. He learned to have a mania for doctoring; and set up the Kanakas against the remedies of his regular rivals: perhaps (if anything matter at all in the treatment of such a disease) the worst thing that he did, and certainly the easiest. The best and worst of the man appear in his dealings with Mr. Chapman's money; he had originally laid it out' (intended to lay it out) 'entirely for the benefit of Catholics, and even so not wisely; but after a long, plain talk, he admitted his error fully and revised the list. The sad state of

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the boys' home is in part the result of his lack of control ; in part, of his own slovenly ways and false ideas of hygiene. Brother officials used to call it "Damien's Chinatown." "Well," they would say, "your Chinatown keeps growing." And he would laugh with perfect good-nature and adhere to his errors with perfect obstinacy. So much I have gathered of truth about this plain noble human brother and father of ours ; his imperfections are the traits of his race, by which we know him for our fellow ; his martyrdom and his example nothing can lessen or annul ; and only a person here on the spot can properly appreciate their greatness.'

" I have set down these private passages, as you perceive, without correction ; thanks to you, the public has them in their bluntness. They are almost a list of the man's faults, for it is rather these that I was seeking : with his virtues, with the heroic profile of his life, I and the world were already sufficiently acquainted. I was besides a little suspicious of Catholic testimony ; in no ill

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sense, but merely because Damien's admirers and disciples were the least likely to be critical. I know you will be more suspicious still ; and the facts set down above were one and all collected from the lips of Protestants who had opposed the father in his life. Yet I am strangely deceived, or they build up the image of a man, with all his weaknesses, essentially heroic, and alive with rugged honesty, generosity and mirth.

"Take it for what it is, rough private jottings of the worst sides of Damien's character, collected from the lips of those who had laboured with and (in your own phrase) 'knew the man' ; —though I question whether Damien would have said that he knew you. Take it, and observe with wonder how well you are served by your gossips, how ill by your intelligence and sympathy ; in how many points of fact we are at one, and how widely our appreciations vary. There is something wrong here ; either with you or me. It is possible, for instance, that you, who seem to have so many ears in Kalawao, had heard of the affair of Mr. Chapman's money, and were singly struck by Damien's intended wrong-

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doing. I was struck with that also, and set it fairly down ; but I was struck much more by the fact that he had the honesty of mind to be convinced. I may here tell you that it was a long business ; that one of his colleagues sat with him late into the night, multiplying arguments and accusations ; that the father listened as usual with ‘ perfect good-nature and perfect obstinacy ;’ but at the last, when he was persuaded, ‘Yes,’ said he, ‘I am very much obliged to you ; you have done me a service ; it would have been a theft.’ There are many (not Catholics merely) who require their heroes and saints to be infallible ; to these the story will be painful ; not to the true lovers, patrons, and servants of mankind.

“And I take it, this is a type of our division ; that you are one of those who have an eye for faults and failures ; that you take a pleasure to find and publish them ; and that, having found them, you make haste to forget the overvailing virtues and the real success which had alone introduced them to your knowledge. It is a dangerous frame of mind. That you may understand how

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dangerous, and into what a situation it has already brought you, we will (if you please) go hand-in-hand through the different phrases of your letter, and candidly examine each from the point of view of its truth, its appositeness, and its charity.

“Damien was *coarse*.

“It is very possible. You make us sorry for the lepers, who had only a coarse old peasant for their friend and father. But you, who were so refined, why were you not there, to cheer them with the lights of culture? Or may I remind you that we have some reason to doubt if John the Baptist was genteel; and in the case of Peter, on whose career you doubtless dwell approvingly in the pulpit, no doubt at all he was a ‘coarse, headstrong’ fisherman! Yet even in our Protestant Bibles Peter is called Saint.

“Damien was *dirty*.

“He was. Think of the poor lepers annoyed with this dirty comrade! But the clean Dr. Hyde was at his food in a fine house.

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“Damien was *headstrong*.

“I believe you are right again ; and I thank God for his strong head and heart.

“Damien was *bigoted*.

“I am not fond of bigots myself, because they are not fond of me. But what is meant by bigotry, that we should regard it as a blemish in a priest ? Damien believed his own religion with the simplicity of a peasant or a child ; as I would I could suppose that you do. For this, I wonder at him some way off ; and had that been his only character, should have avoided him in life. But the point of interest in Damien, which has caused him to be so much talked about and made him at last the subject of your pen and mine, was that, in him, his bigotry, his intense and narrow faith, wrought potently for good, and strengthened him to be one of the world’s heroes and exemplars.

“Damien was *not sent to Molokai, but went there without orders*.

“Is this a misreading ? Or do you really mean the words for blame ? I have heard Christ, in the pulpits of our church, held up

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for imitation on the ground that His sacrifice was voluntary. Does Dr. Hyde think otherwise ?

*“Damien did not stay at the settlement, &c.*

“It is true he was allowed many indulgences. Am I to understand that you blame the father for profiting by these, or the officers for granting them ? In either case, it is a mighty Spartan standard to issue from the house on Beretania Street ; and I am convinced you will find yourself with few supporters.

*“Damien had no hand in the reforms, &c.*

“I think even you will admit that I have already been frank in my description of the man I am defending ; but before I take you up upon this head, I will be franker still, and tell you that perhaps nowhere in the world can a man taste a more pleasurable sense of contrast than when he passes from Damien’s ‘Chinatown’ at Kalawao to the beautiful Bishop-Home at Kalaupapa. At this point, in my desire to make all fair for you, I will break my rule and adduce Catholic testimony. Here is a passage from my diary

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about my visit to the Chinatown, from which you will see how it is (even now) regarded by its own officials : 'We went round all the dormitories, refectories, &c., dark and dingy enough, with a superficial cleanliness, which he' (Mr. Dutton, the lay brother) 'did not seek to defend. "It is almost decent," said he ; "the Sisters will make that all right when we get them here.'" And yet I gathered it was already better since Damien was dead, and far better than when he was there alone and had his own (not always excellent) way. I have now come far enough to meet you on a common ground of fact ; and I tell you that, to a mind not prejudiced by jealousy, all the reforms of the lazaretto, and even those which he most vigorously opposed, are properly the work of Damien. They are the evidence of his success ; they are what his heroism provoked from the reluctant and the careless. Many were before him in the field ; Mr. Meyer, for instance, of whose faithful work we hear too little : there have been many since ; and some had more worldly wisdom, though none had more devotion, than our saint. Before his day, even you will confess, they had effected

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little. It was his part, by one striking act of martyrdom, to direct all men's eyes on that distressful country. At a blow, and with the price of his life, he made the place illustrious and public. And that, if you will consider largely, was the one reform needful; pregnant of all that should succeed. It brought money; it brought (best individual addition of them all) the Sisters; it brought supervision, for public opinion and public interest landed with the man at Kalawao. If ever any man brought reforms, and died to bring them, it was he. There is not a clean cup or towel in the Bishop-Home but dirty Damien washed it.

*“. . . The leprosy of which he died should be attributed to his vices and carelessness.”*

“How do you know that? Is this the nature of the conversation in that house on Beretania Street, which the cabman envied, driving past?—racy details of the misconduct of the poor peasant-priest, toiling under the cliffs of Molokai?

“Many have visited the station before me; they seem not to have heard the rumour. When I was there, I heard many shocking

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tales, for my informants were men speaking with the plainness of the laity ; and I heard plenty of complaints of Damien. Why was this never mentioned ? And how came it to you in the retirement of your clerical parlour ?

“ But I must not even seem to deceive you. This scandal, when I read it in your letter, was not new to me. I had heard it once before ; and I must tell you how. There came to Samoa a man from Honolulu ; he, in a public-house on the beach, volunteered the statement . . . I find a joy in telling you how the report was welcomed in a public-house. A man sprang to his feet ; I am not at liberty to give his name, but from what I heard I doubt if you would care to have him to dinner in Beretania Street. ‘ You miserable little — ’ (here is a word I dare not print, it would so shock your ears). ‘ You miserable little — ,’ he cried, ‘ if the story were a thousand times true, can’t you see you are a million times a lower — for daring to repeat it ? ’ I wish it could be told of you that when the report reached you in your house, perhaps after family worship, you had found in your soul enough holy

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anger to receive it with the same expressions; ay, even with that one which I dare not print; it would not have needed to have been blotted away, like Uncle Toby's oath, by the tears of the recording angel; it would have been counted to you for your brightest righteousness. But you have deliberately chosen the part of the man from Honolulu, and you have played it with improvements of your own. The man from Honolulu—miserable, leering creature—communicated the tale to a rude knot of beach-combing drinkers in a public-house, where (I will so far agree with your temperance opinions) man is not always at his noblest; and the man from Honolulu had himself been drinking—drinking, we may charitably fancy, to excess. It was to your 'Dear brother, the Reverend H. B. Gage,' that you chose to communicate the . . . story; and the blue ribbon which adorns your portly bosom forbids me to allow you the extenuating plea that you were drunk when it was done. Your 'dear brother'—a brother indeed—made haste to deliver up your letter (as a means of grace, perhaps) to the religious papers; where, after many months, I found and read and

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wondered at it ; and whence I have now reproduced it for the wonder of others: And you and your dear brother have, by this cycle of operations, built up a contrast very edifying to examine in detail: The man whom you do not care to have to dinner, on the one side ; on the other, the Reverend Dr. Hyde and the Reverend H. B. Gage : the Apia bar-room, the Honolulu manse:

“ But I fear you scarce appreciate how you appear to your fellow men ; and to bring it home to you, I will suppose your story to be true. I will suppose—and God forgive me for supposing it—that Damien faltered and stumbled in his narrow path of duty ; I will suppose that, in the horror of his isolation, perhaps in the fever of incipient disease, he, who was doing so much more than he had sworn, failed in the letter of his priestly oath —he, who was so much a better man than either you or me, who did what we have never dreamed of daring—he too tasted of our common frailty. ‘ O, Iago, the pity of it ! ’ The least tender should be moved to tears ; the most incredulous to prayer. And all that you could do

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was to pen your letter to the Reve  
H. B. Gage !

“ Is it growing at all clear to you what a picture you have drawn of your own heart ? I will try yet once again to make it clearer. You had a father : suppose this tale were about him, and some informant brought it to you, proof in hand : I am not making too high an estimate of your emotional nature when I suppose you would regret the circumstance ? that you would feel the tale of frailty the more keenly since it shamed the author of your days ? and that the last thing you would do would be to publish it in the religious press ? Well, the man who tried to do what Damien did, is my father, and the father of the man in the Apia bar, and the father of all who love goodness ; and he was your father too, if God had given you grace to see it.”

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